

interzone

JANUARY 2001

NUMBER 163

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Tony Ballantyne

Eric Brown

Paul Di Filippo

James Lovegrove

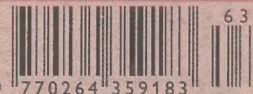
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Interviews with

Juliet McKenna

Charles de Lint

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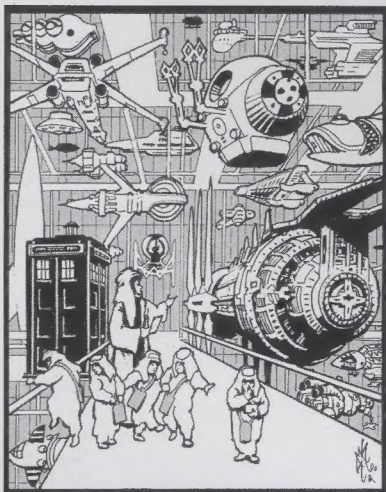
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interzone

science fiction & fantasy

JANUARY 2001

Number 163

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Alternate Worlds

Dear Editors:

More thoughts to add to the alternate-worlds debate (trying not to repeat things I've said before):

It seems to me that there are two kinds of stories about alternate worlds, or parallel universes, or whatever.

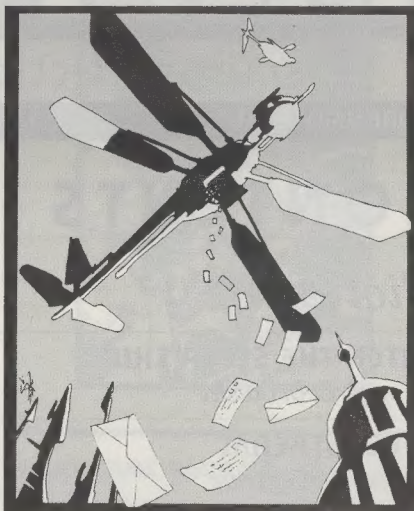
The first kind explores the consequences of a genuinely interesting difference, which provokes the reader to think, "Hmm, I wonder what it would be like to live in such a world?" – the appeal being the fact that it is the familiar that has changed. The genuinely interesting difference can range from a straightforward turn of history, such as the Spanish Armada triumphant in 1588, to an altogether exotic change – controllable anti-matter falling into the lap of the British Empire, for instance, or people's souls taking the form of talking animals.

Unlike most of the rest of fiction, which is generally about stuff that probably didn't happen but might have done, alternate-world stories are specifically about things that we know didn't happen. Obviously I'm oversimplifying, but the fact is, authors of alternate-world stories have an additional responsibility to ensure that the story does not feel irrelevant.

My personal preference is for stories in which someone from our universe finds themselves in another universe, and has to learn what's different – this adds a much-needed dynamism to what might otherwise be dry exposition. Sadly, "dry exposition" is how I would describe the great majority of the first kind of alternate-world stories that I have read in *Interzone*.

The second kind of alternate-world story is the default kind – it's an alternate-world story simply because it isn't anything else. Instead of using some twist of history to justify the events in the story, the authors simply mix and match events and personalities as they see fit; if asked how the situation came about they reply (in what I imagine would be condescending tones), "It's set in a parallel world." A typical example include the shifting of the October Revolution to the USA.

What gets me most about this second kind is that the purveyors of it seem to have no sense of mileage. It's a bit like encountering deliberate anachronisms in what you thought



was a serious historical drama – the first might make you laugh, but after two or three you just want to switch off. Furthermore, there are no restrictions to this kind of story, no discipline required. Hitler can appear as a guest in the *Goon Show*, or Martin Luther King can assassinate JFK. But it stops working once you've got the idea, because when anything is possible, nothing can be interesting.

Paul Beardsley

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Defending Piper and Bujold

Dear Editors:

Although I was irritated by much of Chris Gilmore's review column in *Interzone* 161, the comment I'd most like to take issue with is his throw-away assertion that H. Beam Piper killed himself because he felt was no longer "at the top." The version of events that I have heard myself is that he continued to pay the debts of his French ex-wife even after their divorce, that due to a postal strike he had not received any of the cheques for numerous stories that he had sold and that his personal beliefs as a Libertarian did not allow him to continue incurring and being responsible for debts he could not repay. Perhaps equally self-involved but rather less vain and trivial.

And as to why people enjoy Lois McMaster Bujold? Well, comedy of manners has been popular since Jane Austen at least. Consider the following comments from a speech by Larry Wall (and then read the rest at www.wall.org/~larry/pm.html):

"Note how we still periodically hear the phrase 'serious literature'. This is literature that is supposedly about Real Life. Let me tell you something. The most serious literature I've ever read is by Lois McMaster Bujold. Any of you read her? It's also the funniest literature I've ever read. It's also space opera. 'Genre fiction,' sneers the Modernist. Meaning it follows certain conventions. So what? Nobody in the world can mix gravity and levity the way Bujold does in her Vorkosigan books. It's oh so definitely about real life. So what if it follows space opera conventions. Sonnets follow certain conventions too, but I don't see them getting sneered at much these days. Certainly they were always called 'serious'. How long till Bujold becomes required reading in high school? Far too long, in my opinion. Horrors. We wouldn't want our students actually enjoying what they read. It's not – it's not Real Life."

But Chris Gilmore says Bujold has chosen to write about a culturally and scientifically backward world where they use groundcars and needleguns. Well, heaven forfend we should allow writers to choose their milieu!

Mary Branscombe

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Taking Exception

Dear Editors:

As I read Chris Gilmore's reply to Mark Bould's letter in the October 2000 *Interzone*, I thought one thing: this is a joke, right? Can anybody actually be this gung-ho and ill-informed? Mark Bould made a lot of good points, points not often raised in speculative fiction due to most of the stuff we read having come from American or British authors who are, like the rest of the western world, steeped in the stupidity and bias of our media. Chris Gilmore, in reply, gave us information apparently gleaned from the pages of *Newsweek* (that bastion of corporate American thought), or perhaps even *Warlord*.

First of all, re: Saddam Hussein, I don't think anybody can deny that he is a thug. And that's what he would have remained, a petty thug most likely brought down by his own people, unless the Americans had stepped in and given him, along with mounds of arms and aid in order to fight Iran for them, a huge ego. Now, as he no longer obeys the US, he is portrayed, as Mark Bould points out, as Darth

Vader, despite the fact that some of his worst acts (gassing of Kurd villages and so on) were done while he was a buddy of the west.

Mr Gilmore furthermore seems to imagine that it's only military personnel who are, and were, being killed in the West's ongoing Turkey shoot in Iraq. Let's think about the huge number of conscripts in the Iraqi army, as well as the thousands of civilians killed during the Gulf "war" (who the US often claimed were soldiers in disguise, though I guess this has always been their definition of "civilian"). And now we have tens of thousands of Iraqis, mostly children, dying every month as a result of the inhuman embargo forced on the people of Iraq by the US, to bring down a brutal leader which they themselves forced on them.

As for soldiers having the obligation to surrender to the more "virtuous" side, let's remember that the "virtuous" US are the only country ever to have bombed an operational nuclear reactor (during the Gulf War), and

have sprayed the land and marketplaces of Iraq and Serbia, among others, with such "virtuous" weapons as cluster bombs and depleted uranium shells. And the mechanism suggested for these surrenders ("get out of his tank, APC or whatever run half a kilometre to east or west, then turn south") is laughable at the very least, considering how the desert is very large, very hot and very peppered with unexploded weaponry.

Maybe this tirade was a joke, and I missed the punch line. If so, I apologize. But if not, it displays what is for me a great problem in science fiction, namely its unfortunate marriage to the military – especially that of the US – and, for all its talk of pushing frontiers, its blind acceptance of the status quo.

Pat Kelly
patkelly@hotmail.com

Caught in the Crossfire

Dear Editors:

Chris Gilmore's rantings on war are the limit ("Interaction," October 2000). Apparently, "The dead of Coventry and Dresden were not victims of murder, and no one has ever been so stupid as to arraign the Luftwaffe or the RAF on their account." What about the arguments over terror-bombing going back at least to the Spanish Civil War? In reality, the issue has been contentious since Zeppelins first made bombing practical. It has been fiercely debated as recently as the 1999 raids on Belgrade. The barbarity of the Nazis is not in question, but there has been a major discussion about "Bomber" Harris and the destruction of Dresden. Throughout, the accusation of "murder" has been raised, as it was in the case of Iraqi soldiers killed in the "turkey shoot" on the road to Basra at the end of the Gulf War. I can't believe Chris is entirely ignorant of all this so I assume he's baiting liberals and lefties.

There has always been an ideological debate in sf. A defining factor of the 1960s New Wave was its question-

ing and usually oppositional stance, among other things exploring and challenging issues of sexuality, authority and imperialism. To be taken seriously as writing, sf had itself to take seriously its approach to character, style and politics. *Interzone* certainly started out in that tradition, but now sometimes displays a middle-aged complacency, settling slightly toward the comfortable mainstream. While Nick Lowe's reviewing is as rigorous as ever, Gary Westfahl's column leaves me cold and I wish Chris Gilmore thought his arguments through with half the discipline that he gives to correct grammar.

Whinging aside, you still provide provocative and inspiring stories, like those of Zoran Zivkovic, Brain Stableford, Tanith Lee and Barrington J. Bayley. Finally, congratulations on printing so much translated work: that is one area that has really improved.

Ken Olende
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The old sci-fi writer, as we called him, was explaining times past to us. His eyes were bright as he sat behind his desk, as if the lamp of his mind was shining through them, or trying to; and he seemed to believe that we might just understand what he was trying to tell us.

"We battled for our futures," he said, leaning back in his old chair, "with words that formed the probabilities from which we might choose or reject what might come. We said things to our readers in endless displays of possibility, hoping that one or two might help save us. And rejection of a future might be more important than an acceptance of what the world was choosing to do, or blundering into it. As one of our great ones said, we were not so much trying to predict the future as to prevent it!"

"But wasn't anyone else trying to look ahead?" I asked. "Science-fiction writers couldn't have been the only ones."

He smiled through his wrinkles and leaned forward. "Yes, there were others, although I sometimes had my doubts. At the beginning of the 20th century, one of our great fathers, H.G. Wells, also started a thing called future studies, with his essay, 'The Discovery of the Future.' But this little industry didn't really get going until after 1950.

It wasn't as good as the fiction. Too rigid – all numbers and trends and projections. AI Minds do it better today, not that it does any good. As an example, our mother, Mary Shelley, looked ahead by saying that we are all monsters inside and likely to misuse what knowledge we gained. Misuse was hardly ever studied in future studies. The effect of changes in science and technology and social systems affecting human nature in negative ways was left to fictionists. And they did better by looking ahead in that way than the pure thinkers. Even Wells did better in his fiction than in his serious projections." He smiled sadly, then said, "You'd think it would have been the other way around. Sometimes we liked the drama of bad things more than that of good hopes."

"And what happened next?" I asked, looking around at my fellow students. They didn't seem to care, and I knew that they didn't really want to be here. It seemed unimportant to them whether they fast-read a story or eyed it,

or whether it was set in the past, present, or future. Science fiction, sci-fi – these were just a bunch of old words.

"It all turned to fun and games," he said, "in which you might only sometimes slip in things no one wanted to hear straight out. And even then no one noticed. I shouldn't have been surprised. It was the way of most art."

"Art?" I asked. "There was art in what is now a dead commercial genre?"

He flinched at my question, then smiled.

"Miraculous, isn't it? But yes. As Bertrand de Jouvenal once said, the creation of viable futures is as great an achievement as any work of art. I may not have the words right, so don't quote me."

"And did anyone do it?" I asked. "Create futures, I mean."

He smiled again. "So well that the world you see around you is all made from wishes and imaginings, and warnings about them. Even the VR dreamworlds that wait to take us... in the long lives you will have, were once wishes." He stopped suddenly. "Excuse me," he said. "Many of our wishes should not have been fulfilled."

He looked ill for a moment, and paused. "What's wrong?" I asked.

"We... all of us were making the future, as Wells once said, and few of us bothered to think what future we were making, and here it is. I have to keep reminding myself of that. I try

not to think of it, but it still surprises me when I do."

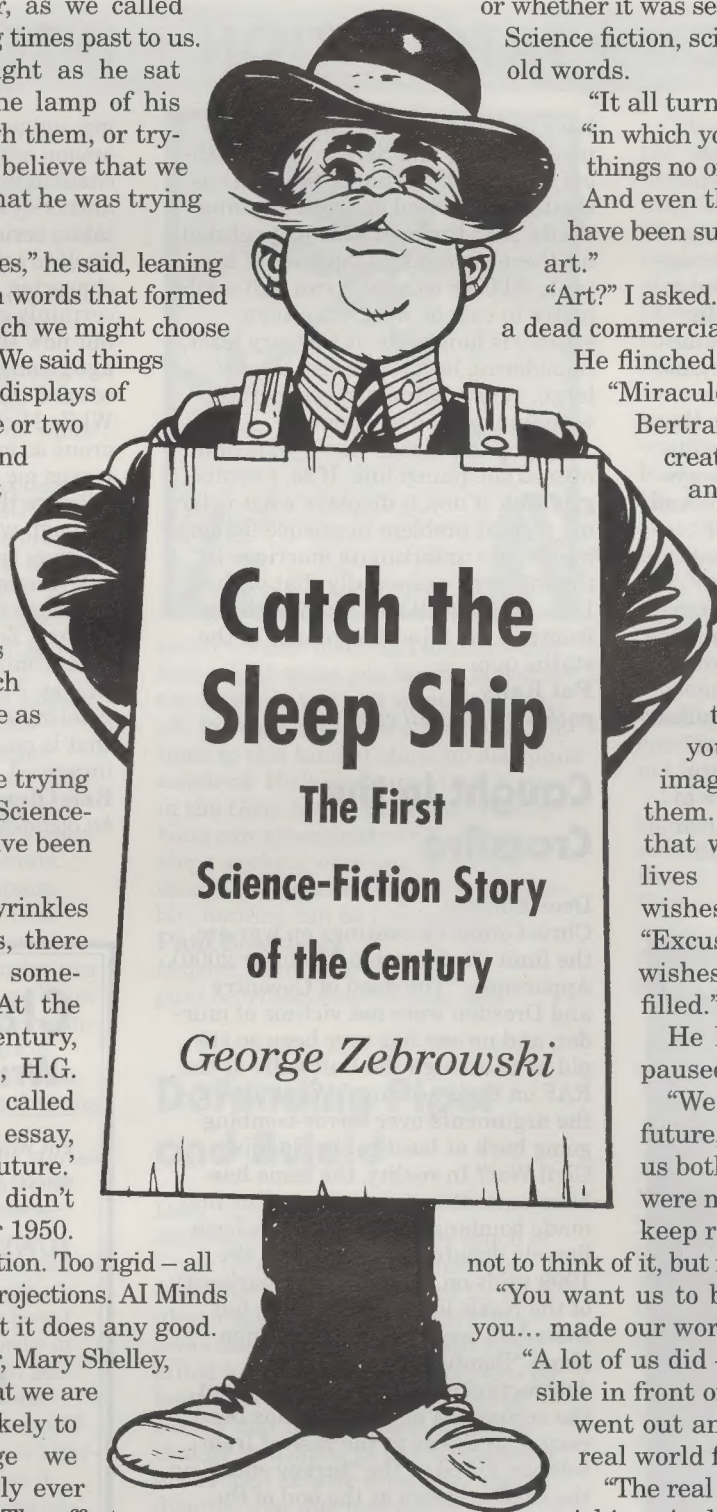
"You want us to believe you... and others like you... made our world?" a young woman asked.

"A lot of us did – we put the scent of the possible in front of the greedy, and their money went out and built all this, and stole the real world from you."

"The real world?" I asked. "Surely you're joking. And what do you mean by we? No one else was doing these things?" I knew his answers, but I wanted to show my fellow students that I wasn't completely slaved.

"By we I mean imagineers," he said. "Imagination comes before all accomplishment. Someone must imagine, then others will do. There must always be a menu of possible dreams. We wrote many such menus."

That got an uneasy laugh, but there seemed to be pain in how he spoke the words, which made many of us uncertain. After all this was only a gut course, taught by an old writer whose friends had gotten him a job in the university. I wondered whether he was going in for his



rejuvenation treatments. He could certainly afford it – but it seemed that by his manner he was saying that he wasn't going to be around much longer, and that he didn't want to be, even though he certainly could be, if he wished it.

"A lot of you just made a lot of money," the young girl said, "and didn't much care about thinking or the future."

He smiled again and said, "I can only speak for myself – and I wrote for money so I could write what I loved to write, less though there was of that kind of writing as the media looted all our best ideas and refused to present our stories unless they pissed into them first."

He seemed unattractive then, since few of us used offensive words or profanity. He was unattractive too often.

"It was partly your own fault," I said, feeling sure of my scholarship. "Those of you who recycled the major themes and ideas –"

He looked at me fiercely, as if surprised that I knew enough to catch him on a sore point.

"Ah, but we wrote so many of them so much better. Remember, it is not the idea but the execution that makes a great work of art."

"Yes," I said impatiently, "but a great new idea and great execution beats an old idea with great execution. But that's not my point. What is shown by the evidence is that sf writers did not hang on to their lead over a science and technology culture, by entertaining new ideas at the edges of the knowledge industries."

He nodded. "Yes, we recycled and were looted in turn. It was just too hard for many of us to learn anything new. Too many of us said in our hearts, you don't have to do all that just to write science fiction." He grimaced. "And the money quieted our scruples." He sighed. "Oh, the money. They gave you a lot sometimes, or just enough, often far too little, and then they threatened to take it away, whichever class of writer you belonged to. You'd do anything to keep it coming, however little it was."

We stared at him in silence, questionless, and for a moment he looked embarrassed. "I tried to remain a serious writer, but it was increasingly like trying to fit fibre-glass whales into the food chain." He paused. "It's an old joke. A writer whose name I can't recall ran it into the ground."

"What's a serious writer?" asked a young man.

The old writer smiled. "Gore Vidal said once that literature is something most writers fear. They worry that they won't measure up, either in style or in the importance of what they have to say. They are afraid of it, because literature has sharp teeth and a capacious stomach, old Gore said."

"Who?" asked a young woman.

"Let's back up a bit," he said finally, "and ask what science fiction, scientifiction, sf, sci-fi, and the nameless thing of today was, is, really about." He sat back. "For

most of human history our tales were about what was, and what is. A genuine state-change, a quantum leap, occurred when we began to story-up about what might be. For most of the 20th century, science fiction was denigrated as escapist fare, as a building of castles in the airless. Even within the field we saw disguised terms for this, as when reviewers complained about a story failing to show us how we got from here to there, and forgot the

vision." He smiled. "You know, my parents made fun of what might be, as something unworthy of discussion and a waste of time for me. And you know what that kind of talk was – it was the sound of people who had given up, and my youthful heart swelled with rebellion and pride, my intellect sought service with the armies of imagination, because I could see among the blind."

He was silent, the class was still questionless, and I felt sorry for him.

"The question," he went on, "is what should we become. And while answering it we must be able to first say what we want to be. It may take a lifetime. Up to now we haven't had enough time."

"But can we choose?" I asked. "Are we that free?"

"I think we are," he said, but by the doubt in his voice I felt that he was only hoping that it was a choice, and that we weren't anything at all right now, and maybe even glad that there was so little choice of what we would become.

"We should be free," I said. "I'll agree with that."

He gave me a piercing look and said, "But you can see that freedom. The trouble is that you doubt, not the possibility of it, but your willingness to try for it."

Questionless and uninterested, the other students got up and left the hall. I sat there for a while, looking at him as if he were a stone statue. He didn't seem to mind.

"Would you like to come over?" he asked at last. "I could use some company."

I had felt that he had wanted to ask me to his house, but something always seemed to stop him.

Curious, I went home with him, to a three-storey wooden house at the edge of town.

He cooked a meal, Fritz Leiber fish stew, from the old cookbook edited by Anne McCaffrey.

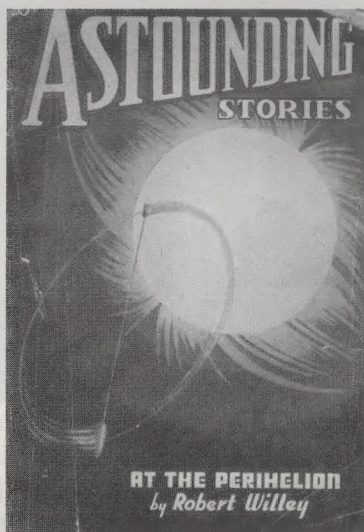
"Fritz Leiber," he said, "was the greatest science fiction and fantasy writer of the 20th century."

"For his ideas?" I asked.

"No – for his execution," he admitted.

"And who did both?" I asked.

He smiled. "Well, Fritz wasn't a slouch with the ideas, either. Both? Well there was an Eastern European named Lem who gave us all a hard time about our laziness with thinking. Before him a man named John W. Campbell, a great editor who got mad at us all the time. Left a big hole when he died in 1971. Later, when Lem left, some of us realized that he was much like Campbell in his complaints."



After dinner, he showed me his aging collection of sf books and magazines, lovingly preserved in deacidified containers. The magazines he kept on neat wooden shelves in his clothes closet, where the ceiling went up twelve feet, and you had to use a ladder. There weren't many clothes. The books were on wooden shelves, floor to ceiling, in every room and on every wall where it had been possible to build. I saw that not many new volumes had been added. The newest were stuck in flat on top of the standing volumes.

"I had to gas all the books and magazines a few years ago," he said, "to slow up the acidification of the paper."

"Did you have to? They'll all still become dust, at a pace three to five times slower."

He nodded before his collection of *Astounding Science Fiction*, then reached into a drawer and took out a single shining disc.

"It's all on here – every snarking book in the house. But it's not enough. I like the old artefacts. There's nothing like them. Once I had to sell a small group of valuable books, about 50 of them. Then I bought them all back, when I couldn't afford it. Pure folly. But you have to have a folly in your life."

He sat down in a big green plush chair. I sat down in the sofa across from him. "So what now?" I asked.

He leaned back and said, "I have an idea, the greatest new idea in all science fiction – as new as time machines, alien invasions, invisible men, post-holocaust, parallel worlds – as new as they were when they were done the first time."

"What?" I asked, leaning forward. "Writers of genius have picked over all the possibilities – at least those ideas that most readers could understand. Is it even possible?"

"It sure is," he said, tapping his temple with his right forefinger, "but it took everything from me to find it."

"What is it?"

He laughed. "You think I'll talk it out? Never. It's a humdinger."

"A what? So when will you present it?"

He shook his head. "Don't rightly know." He glanced at his darkened study just off the living room. The door was slightly open, and I could see that all his equipment was off. Old style picture tube monitor a foot deep, finger keyboard, and paper printer. I suddenly felt his age, by the fact that his equipment wasn't on all the time. He was still trying to save power.

"When will I see it?" I asked.

"Maybe never," he said.

"That would be sad," I said.

"I mean maybe never for you."

"What do you mean?"

He did not answer.

After a while I asked, "How often have you been rejuvenated?"

He smiled. "Two or three times. But it's not enough." "What do you mean?"

"Enough to have taken me far from my time, but not enough to get me forward toward the changes I want. Too slow."

"How much change do you want?"

"A new humankind would do just fine. Anything but what we have now, here in 2026. I was born in 1930."

"Then you must hate yourself, too," I said.

"I do," he said, then got up, made his goodnights, and left me alone in the living room.

"You shouldn't hate yourself," I wanted to tell him, but I knew what he'd say: "You're too young to think badly of yourself. The young mostly have to like them-

selves. They can't help it."

I sat there for a few minutes, listening to him moving around on his second floor, thinking of the times he had once described to me, when wannabe writers who hung around published ones actually learned to become new writers, through a strange method called apprenticeship. "Nowadays," he had said, "you tap in your wish for how the story should be, and have an AI put a lot of technique on it and this produces a work that's dead as a doornail, to coin a phrase." He laughed. "But it's consumed by idiots who don't know the difference and admire the polish."

I got up and went home.

He did not show up for his next class, so I went over to see what was wrong. His front door was open, the living room was dark, but the lights in his study were blazing white. I knocked and stepped inside.

The study was empty, but his old fashioned plasma monitor was on above his keyboard – he did not dictate. I came up to it and saw a message:

"To whom it may be of no concern: I've gone biotiming into the future, to find a better humanity."

He had not signed his name.

I scrolled up and found the title of a story:

Catch the Sleep Ship

My pulse quickened. His great new idea was here!

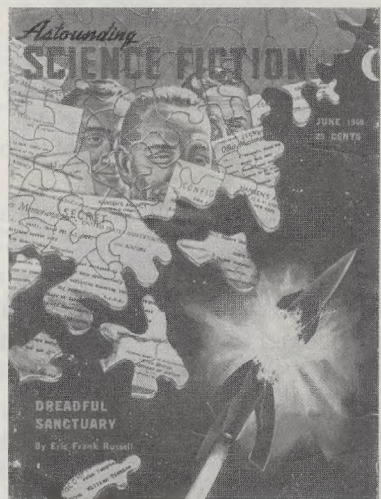
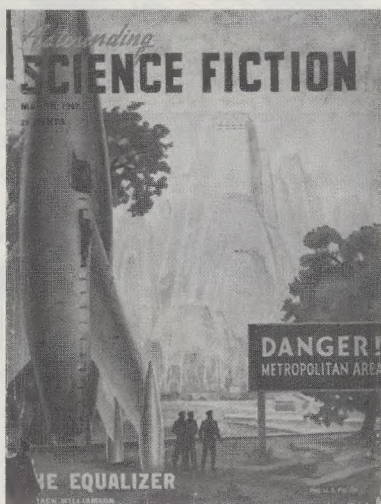
I scrolled up past his byline, holding my breath.

My heart sank.

He had deleted the rest of the story.

And I knew then that the great new idea had voyaged into the future with him. It was with him where he slept, in the safe biotime facility of his choice – to emerge a century, two, three centuries hence.

I would have to live long enough to read it, see it, feel



it, dream it – in whatever form it was to be realized.

It would be a long time, without my biotiming after him.

As I looked at the old plasma screen, I knew that I would give anything to know what he had written on its bright, puffy energies.

But wait. It was an old piece of technology. Maybe the data was still there, retrievable if I was patient.

I got it in on the first try.

“Gotcha!” read the message. “But it’ll do you no good. I took the major component with me. You’re getting the plug-in spare with this message. But why should you care about my story? Why should anyone? I won’t know if they’ll care about it where I’m going. It might seem quaint by then. Who knows! But I’ll be there, and living is more important than what’s written down... that is if you can understand what you’ve lived... then maybe you should write it down... goodbye my friend, if you got this far to read this. I guess I’m tired of peering into possibility, thinking it through, and never knowing it. I’m going ahead to live it, then get some more when I need it. For I have looked into futures for so long that I must now enter them, embrace them. Futurity is another country, where, I hope, they do in fact do things differently. And if there is another, better humanity waiting there, I’ll gladly join it and pay my dues. The trouble with the past I’ve spent my life in... is that it rushed past its futures too quickly. It wore them out too fast, got too little out of them. I’ll catch the sleep ship, where I’ve booked a cabin, a safe place to sleep off this time of ours, mine, and yours still to come, as I voyage toward the places that once were dreams, too often nightmares. The future is back where it belongs, at least for a while, back in my dreams. I will dream until I wake.”

I wanted to go with him.

There was nowhere else for me to go, I realized, as the full implications of what he had taught hit me. To live in time was to exist with a clock ticking away, always to be becoming, never being, never stopping to rest and truly to think and to see.

And I knew what he had done.

He had stopped time.

Asleep and biotiming, he would exist forever in a virtual reality. For him it would always be the eternity between midnight and sunrise. And whatever he wished for would rise up as reality around him. He would write and be wanted for his work. It would not be used to extort money out of those unfortunate enough to want to read him.

He has no wish to waken, I knew suddenly, realizing that he might never emerge from VR sleep. He might dream until his body gave out, the equipment failed, or for some reason the Earth or Sun died. What would

death be for him then, in that moment when it broke in on his dreams? Was this his way of suicide?

I thought it might be for a few moments, but now I don’t think he was trying to kill himself.

He was betting that either a better future would awaken him from his sleep of possibilities, or a worse future would confirm his worst fears.

As I sat there, numb with the realities that had broken in on me, I saw a crumpled piece of paper on the floor. I picked it up and uncrumpled it, thinking suddenly how a flat piece of space gets crumpled into a three dimensional one...

“Gotcha!” the note read. “So you still read words on paper! Maybe I’ll tell you my great new idea after all.”

My hands trembled as I smoothed the paper out to see better what he had scrawled there:

“A good fiction should not be systematic in laying out a problem or a dilemma. That would make it a treatise. Rather, it should be like an unwelcome guest at dinner telling us things we would fear beyond the safety of the page, a teller who blurts out the truth and brings silence. The teller of fictions should make us tremble as we understand, and make us lose ourselves. He should make us feel and not know which way to turn, to forget all sense of right and wrong – and not bring us back right away, but leave us insane for a while after we stop reading. Thinking starts after that...”

“Reluctance to face these things ruins many a writer. Most never break out into this freedom, or to the reality inside their own human character. When in doubt, blurt it out.

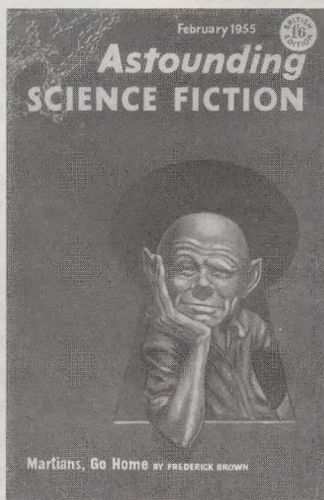
“But a man hasn’t had enough time to break out, to break into himself, until recently. He has to first break out of himself, then back into himself, before he can break into others of his kind. They say, that as I sleep, I can have a raft of teaching programs flowing into me. Subjects. Straight subjects. I won’t allow anything more... more interpretative.

“So I’m breaking out, for now. One day I’ll break back in. You’ve seen the movie, so you don’t make the same mistakes again.

“Oh, yes, my great new notion.

“Futurity. Always a new idea. There’s never been anything like it, waiting up ahead the way it does, so that everything doesn’t happen all at once.

“Think about it. I’ll be seeing you there.”



George Zebrowski, whose most recent novel was *Brute Orbits* (1998), appeared in *Interzone* last month with the appropriately-titled “Last SF Story of the 20th Century.” The above piece, although not a “sequel,” is a related item, and both will reappear in his forthcoming collected stories (scheduled for early 2002). George lives in Delmar, New York.

SPEEDSTREAM

James Lovegrove

The look on her face.

Pitying, but still kind.

Blood on his hands.

A death?

The girl smiling.

"Come with me."

Robert Stoneham came to in a hospital where the clocks had eighteen numerals around the dial and the nurses' name badges were printed in an alphabet he did not recognize. He knew, the moment he surfaced from sleep, that he had Slowed, but he did not know to what extent he had Slowed until a week later, when he felt well enough to discharge himself from the hospital and go exploring. Until then, he lived in limbo. In hospital-ward hell. Food like slurry, and a man in the bed on the left who thrashed and moaned through the night, and a man in the bed on the right who was quilled with catheters, the liquids going in – thin and clear; those coming out – viscous and opaque. All day long, from dawn to dusk, a radio played martial music. There was a war on, Stoneham guessed. Maybe that was why the nurses had so little time for him. A stomach complaint. He was not on the critical list. Not a Terminal, nor a War Wound. He passed the hours napping, short stuttering sleeps, trying to get better quickly. As best he could work out, he must have picked up the bug at his last stopover, some upper-level virus that ambushed without warning. A vague memory: falling ill aboard a jet-liner, vomiting violently into a waxed-paper sick bag, a flight attendant standing by, pained, solicitous, holding out a glass of

water, the glass blurring, doubling, going dim.

Another vague memory: a girl, and blood.

A dream?

If so, a vivid one, and the residual impression it left was of guilt. He did not think he had done anything wrong. So why the blood? Why the conviction that he had committed some unspeakable crime?

Dreams. What they could make you believe.

Moaning to his left, multiple drips and trickles to his right. The martial music, and everyone talking in hushed tones, using a language as guttural as Russian, as frantic as Italian, but neither. The nurses: slab-faced, dark-eyed, portly. A patient letting loose into a bedpan, diarrhoea gushing like a tap on full. One night, someone died. Quietly. They wheeled him out in his bed, wheeled in a new bed, installed someone new in it. Quietly.

Stoneham got better. He willed himself to get better.

When he discharged himself, no one was sorry to see him go, and he was not sorry to be out of there.

A hotel in a quarter of a city as old as any city he had ever visited.

A room as gloomily appointed as any hotel room he had ever stayed in.

He had Slowed. Christ, yes. This was not the destination he had set out for at all. This was somewhere in the middle levels. The lower reaches of the middle levels. All that Speed he had accumulated, gone. And he had been so close. He was sure of it. So close to Continuum.

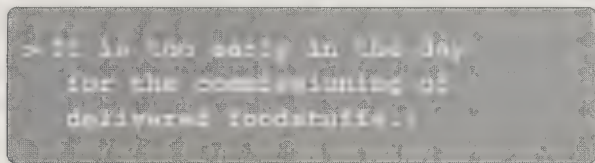
Outside: a cobblestoned street, and cars with animal characteristics (fins, crests, wings, antennae) rumbling

by. Tall thin buildings, in the Parisian style, and shops that barely advertised their existence – a doorway with a few sample wares hung in it, that was all, no sign, no light, no window display, you went in because you knew what you wanted to buy, not because you were curious and felt like browsing.

He still had his Passepartout, thank God. It had not been stolen. It had been kept safely with all his other belongings in a locker at the hospital. He would be lost without his Passepartout.

He had not needed it to help him check in to the hotel. While at the hospital he had picked up *hello* and *please*. You did not have to use much else when booking a room. The concierge knew why you had turned up in his lobby. Dumb-show filled in the gaps. Now Stoneham ran the Passepartout's text sensor over a notice affixed to the back of the hotel-room door – the standard "What to Do in Case of Fire" instructions. The Passepartout read and assimilated, then formulated. Basic grammatical construction. Linguistic irregularities accounted for. It built up a picture of the local language. Parsed, conjugated, declined. Developed, extrapolated. Became fluent. Or conversant in, at any rate.

He tested it out on room service. Picked up the phone, held down TRANSLATE on the Passepartout's keypad, then spoke. "I would like something to eat." The Passepartout burred. The concierge answered. The Passepartout's screen said:



Stoneham smiled. Everything in working order.

"Thanks," he said, and the Passepartout barked some cough-like phrase into the phone receiver.

A stack of brochures from a travel agency and a cup of some bitter-tasting coffee-analogue in a café on the edge of a square with a central fountain. Opposite, a golden-domed basilica. Hawkers traded from market stalls – trinkets and essentials shelved side by side, seemingly of equal value. The sky was cold, clear and bright. Black pigeons with bluey tints to their plumage pecked and strutted around the café tables. People eyed Stoneham. His brochures, his Passepartout, his smart but travel-worn clothes – he could not be anything other than a Fogg. He looked, indeed, the living epitome of a Fogg. The perennial peregrine on a quest for forever. Facing into the brass sunsets of an eternity of western horizons. Forging on at ever-increasing Speed. He relished their stares. They gave him a renewed sense of identity, and consequently a renewed sense of purpose.

As he leafed through the brochures, some soldiers came by and started taunting him in that way that soldiers will, made bold by numbers and uniform. His Passepartout prudishly feigned ignorance of some of the words they spat at him. He let them jeer. They got bored eventually and walked away. Stoneham was used to

being an outsider. Wherever he went now, he was never home. He was used to not belonging.

Several possible destinations suggested themselves. He narrowed them down to a short-list of five, jotting the names down on a paper napkin. The trick was to find somewhere far away but not too far. Somewhere interesting. Somewhere that looked nicer than where you were. Which was not difficult. The brochures made everywhere else seem fantastic. Compared with this city, everywhere else was fantastic.

He shut his eyes and poised his pen, nib down, over the napkin.

His first blind stab missed all five of the names.

His second hit one.

Karakuchon.

However you pronounced that.

A seat was booked on the first available flight to Karakuchon, two days hence.

Two days to kill.

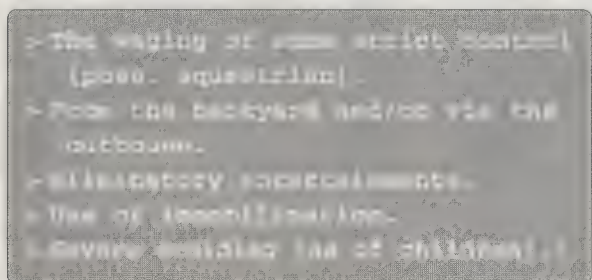
Stoneham had no great desire to see more of his surroundings than he had already seen, but it was that or fester in the hotel. Besides, walking would be a useful preliminary. A way of gradually easing himself back into the rhythm of travel. A way of getting back up to Speed.

Prihody Mishkarov was by no stretch of the imagination a beautiful or remarkable city. It had a couple of museums, dusty and stultifying; a couple of parks that were nearly scenic; a river, broad and sullen and slow; a red-light district where the great majority of clients were, predictably, soldiers on furlough. Stoneham wandered, using a tourist map purchased from a dingy rabbit-hole of a bookshop. It was either early spring here or late autumn – he could not make up his mind which. Bare trees, but not too cold. Newspaper headlines boasted in two-inch capitals of famous victories, acts of phenomenal heroism, "our boys" bravely defending freedom and democracy. Wherever the war was taking place, it was many thousands of miles from here, safely remote. There was no sense that the city, the motherland, was under any immediate threat. Stoneham imagined some fly-ridden foreign hellhole, young men dying half a world away from their families, from all they knew. He felt an empathy. The travel agent had assured him that Karakuchon (emphasis on the penultimate syllable) was nowhere near the fighting. Stoneham would not have been concerned if it was. He had chosen to go there, therefore he would go there.

The two days passed, and on the evening before he was due to leave Stoneham drifted towards the red-light district, pulled, impelled. Sometimes, in a new place, he met a woman and there would be a short-lived, intense affair. Sometimes that woman was a Fogg too, and there would be a greater-than-usual sense of connection in their passion. The vectors of two professional voyagers colliding, fusing. A feeling of mutual, coterminous urgency. Then separation, suddenly businesslike once more. Back to the quest for Speed. Just as often he met no one, no woman, and he did not care. But very occasionally he met no one and the imperative of sex arose anyway and became over-

riding. So he would take advantage of the traveller's privilege – anonymity. Sleep with a whore. Nobody knew who you were. Move on.

Cooing and catcalls. Perfume and pheromones in the mazy alleyways. An almost limitless array of *possibility*. Like some carnal delicatessen, every kind of treat you could think of available. The high-minded Passepartout refused to relay many of the offers made to Stoneham, and those it did it translated obliquely, sometimes impenetrably:



He strolled, unhurried, whetting his appetite, letting anticipation mount. Finally he made his selection. She was not bad-looking. Tall. A broad mouth. Slim-limbed bordering on bony. In a bedroom that reeked of joss-sticks and sweat he found home, briefly, between her legs. She made all the right noises, that Esperanto of sighs and groans. The bed joined in, creaking, Morse-coding the wall with its headboard. Afterwards, all was still. Prihody Mishkarov was gone and there was only this room, the sounds in it, the susurrations of stirred bedcovers, the slowing of heartbeats. Stoneham thought of Joanna. The woman lying beside him, the woman pretending she was not eager for him to leave – he realized now how like his dead wife she looked. Joanna was not so worn, though, not so grainy-skinned. At least, not the way he remembered her.

Feeling glugged and glum, Stoneham got out of bed, dressed, left.

He was reaching the edge of the red-light district, where sin petered out and respectability reasserted itself. All at once a drunken soldier lurched into his path. Stoneham tried to skirt around him, but the soldier, possibly on purpose, veered towards him. Bumped shoulders with him. Took umbrage. A torrent of threats and obscenities spilled from his mouth, his aggressive gestures obviating the need for the Passepartout. Stoneham held up his hands, backed away. Used every piece of body language that said *I don't want trouble*. But that was precisely what the soldier was determined to give him. He swaggered after Stoneham, still berating him, cheeks turning puce. Honour would not be settled until blows had been struck.

Then deliverance.

A slim young prostitute interposed herself between Stoneham and the soldier. She took the latter's hand. He looked as if he might hit her but then had second thoughts. The prostitute chuckled his chin and murmured something, and a big greasy smile lit up the soldier's face. He nodded. Stoneham had been forgotten about. The

prostitute pointed to a doorway and the soldier obediently headed for it.

Before she followed him, she turned to look at Stoneham.

Her.

It was her.

The girl in the dream.

(If it *had* been a dream.)

Petite and dark-haired. Not quite elfin, but getting there. Nineteen? Twenty? Slender legs, calf-length suede boots. A skimpy elasticated skirt. Breast-expressing sweater.

The outfit was not the same. (What had she been wearing in the dream? Not this, at any rate.) The face and body were definitely her.

And her expression: disapproval. Or perhaps disappointment. A warning of some kind. *Be more cautious*.

Then she turned again and made for the doorway.

Stoneham went after her, not knowing why, knowing only because.

"Hey!"

He fumbled for his Passepartout. Wrenched it from his pocket. Hit the power switch.

"Hey, excuse me, hey."

The girl kept going.

He pressed TRANSLATE. "I'm sorry, excuse me, but who *are* you?"

The Passepartout dutifully relayed the question, foreign syllables spilling from its speaker. But the girl, apparently unaware that she was being addressed, ducked through the doorway. The door slammed behind her. Stoneham was left on the street, Passepartout in hand, gazing dumbly at the closed entrance.

It had been her.

No, it had not been her.

It had simply been someone who looked like her.

A mistake. A random, insignificant coincidence.

Perplexed, Stoneham wavered for a moment, then stowed away his Passepartout, rolled his shoulders and continued back to his hotel.

The aeroplane bumped aloft, striving for altitude, propellers churning. For a moment its tail plunged. A sickening belly-swoop. They were not going to make it. Then the pilot had control again. A far cry from the sleek, silk-smooth jet-liner Stoneham had last travelled in. In that aircraft, take-off had been all but imperceptible – a slight tilting of the contents of his cocktail glass. This plane jumped and jolted as it climbed, as though titanic hands were paddling it upwards. A reek of engine oil permeated the cabin. The seats had virtually no cushioning. The airframe bolts rattled.

That was how it was when you Slowed: you descended several notches in comfort and safety. Stoneham remembered how crestfallen he had been, the first time. A small mistake, an error of planning, a missed connection – back down the levels he had slid. *You never forget the first one*, his Fogg Society counsellor, McWilliam, had told him. *Some people never recover from it. But you just have to get back up on that horse. Or donkey, as it will have become.*

Get back up on it and start afresh. McWilliam spoke from bitter experience. He himself had Slowed a disheartening number of times. That was why he had given up, become a counsellor rather than a participant. Those who can, do. Those who cannot, advise.

The plane levelled out, bound for Karakuchon. Prihody Mishkarov was behind Stoneham now. He looked out of the window, which was already misting over with condensation. The city, all muddle and capillary streets, lay far below. Tapering into suburbs – red roofs, squares of garden, pockets of industrial estate.

You dream of a girl: you see that girl, or one very like her.

Chance. Synchronicity. These things happen.

You're a Fogg. You do what Foggs do. You move on.

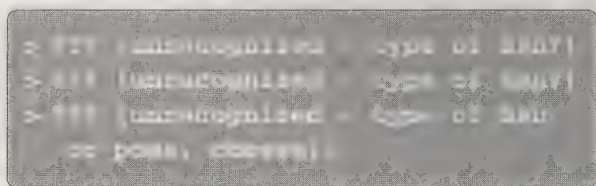
Karakuchon. City of sand, city of glass. Literally a beach resort: spread out across a mile-wide oceanside strand. The buildings themselves made entirely of glass, extruded from the stuff on which they were founded. Indoor privacy achieved by means of blinds and screens. At high noon, a city of migraine dazzle. Sunglasses obligatory.

Every street was raw sand, sloping down towards the sea, so that the shore seemed just a broader thoroughfare, one which the tide regularly inundated. Ferried there in a dune-buggy taxi, Stoneham went promenading. It was his second evening in the city. The travel brochure said that sunset promenading was a tradition in Karakuchon. As the waves withdrew, people came out in their evening-wear. White cotton wafting, gauzy mists of chiffon, linen. Drafting sandal-furrows in the newly dried sand, they strolled. There was greeting and laughter, and a certain amount of speculative gaze-catching. *Popular with singles*, the travel brochure said. For which read: *meat market*.

Stoneham felt comfortable here. After Prihody Mishkarov anywhere was an improvement, but Karakuchon had a good vibe to it, an atmosphere of genuinely relaxed elegance. He had chosen well. Already, though, he was thinking about his next destination. He could not help it. After seven years as a Fogg, seven years in transit, it had become instinct: never settle, keep going, where to now?

The sinking sun turned the buildings to amber, then ruby, then amethyst. Stoneham directed his footsteps towards one of the outdoor restaurants along the waterfront. Glass tables, glass chairs, glass cutlery, glass glasses. The *maitre d'* seated him. A waitress came over with a menu printed on a sheet of clear acetate.

He ordered something to drink, a local aperitif, then set to perusing the menu with his *Passepartout*:



Not much help. He took pot luck. The dish that eventually arrived *was* a type of fish, poached, with vegeta-

bles. Quite tasty.

The restaurant filled up. Stoneham set to people-watching, the solo traveller's habitual mealtime hobby. Someone in the far corner rose, paid the bill, made to leave. He eyed the person idly. Then his interest amplified. Jesus! It couldn't be. The outfit was different, more demure, suitably Karakuchonian, but...

The girl from the red-light district in Prihody Mishkarov. The girl from the dream.

Or if not her, her identical twin.

He felt a moment of hilarious absurdity. This was too much. Someone somewhere was playing a practical joke on him. Was it really...?

He got up, jarring the table with his thighs. The girl was exiting the restaurant, setting off along the shoreline. *Passepartout* in hand, Stoneham went after her. Voices behind him, calling. He ignored them. He had to get to her. He had to ask her who she was and if she remembered him from two nights ago. He had to find out if she was the same girl. It was more than just the need to satisfy his curiosity. He was convinced she was important somehow, whoever she was. Because of the dream (the memory?). Because he had encountered her twice. She had a purpose relevant to him.

He had not gone more than five paces from the restaurant when a hand clamped around his upper arm. The *maitre d'*. Polite but firm. No translation of his words necessary. A small matter of the bill, sir. Payment.

"I need to talk to her." Stoneham gesticulated at the girl, urgent.

The *maitre d'* comprehended but at the same time failed to understand. Yes, sir. Quite. But the bill was a more pressing matter.

Stoneham tried to wrest his arm from the man's grasp. The *maitre d'* would not let go.

The girl, still walking away, glanced over her shoulder to see what all the commotion was. Stoneham implored her with his eyes to halt, give him time to sort things out with the *maitre d'* so that he could then come and speak to her. No good. She turned her face forwards again and carried on.

By the time the bill had been settled, the girl was long gone. Stoneham spent an hour combing the sandy streets for her, in vain. He spent the whole of the next day doing the same. The compulsion dwindled as the day wore fruitlessly on. What was he up to? What was this *thing* he had about her?

As she had turned her head last night, after her glance back, he thought he had glimpsed a look in her eyes – the same look that had been there after she saved him from the drunken soldier in Prihody Mishkarov. But perhaps he had imagined it. Both times. Perhaps she was not even the same girl. Perhaps her features were typical of this level. Perhaps there were dozens, hundreds, thousands of girls here who looked like her.

Was he going mad?

A stout-bodied jumbo jet lifted off from an airport a few miles inland from Karakuchon. Classier and better-con-

structed than the propeller-driven rattletrap in which Stoneham had arrived a week earlier, it eased itself free from the runway, rumbling high. Soon there was only sea below, unending wave-scarred blue.

Goodbye, Karakuchon. Hello, Marn Werev.

Marn Werev: reminiscent of a Belgian city. Flat, planned, orderly, gleaming, greened.

From there, to Hūra. A desert oasis. High pink walls, mosaic-lined swimming pools, fanning palm trees, frenetic medina nightlife.

After that, austere Obgrada. Plains of milky snow all around. Regal avenues, lofty apartment blocks, a populace sturdily resistant to the subzero temperatures and resolutely defiant of boredom.

Then a cruise on a luxury liner, the *Princess Angel*, equator-bound, steaming from north to south, from cold to warmth. Stoneham could feel it within him now, like a plot unfolding, a doubt becoming a certainty.

Speed.

If you were doing well, you graduated through the levels without being fully conscious of doing so. An imperceptible shifting-up of gears. Only when you reached your next destination did you realize that the place you had come to was not in quite the same world as the place you had left behind. Something had changed, something fundamentally indefinable and indefinably fundamental. Somehow you knew – though you could not put your finger on how, exactly – that where you were was universally *better* than where you had been.

And with that sense of improvement, inextricably linked, was a sense of acceleration. The dockside gangplanks, the airport terminals, the customs checks came thicker and faster. You seemed to spend less time travelling; life seemed to become a state of continual arrival.

And you kept on moving, because that was what you did, what you had to do. That was how, as a Fogg, you shook off the past. You moved on.

So Stoneham was able, soon enough, with relative ease, to put the whole business with the girl behind him. Prihody Mishkarov and Karakuchon receded in his wake, becoming just two more stopovers, two more visa stamps in the pages of his umpteenth passport. He was pleased that he had not allowed the episode, peculiar as it was, to deflect him; he was proud to have begun gaining Speed again so rapidly.

Once more, Continuum beckoned. The ultimate goal of every Fogg. The final destination. The purpose. Nobody knew what it was. All that was known was that a few Foggs had disappeared into it. Had accumulated so much Speed, risen so high up the levels, that they vanished out of existence. An abstract concept. Perhaps an illusion. But this theoretical oblivion had been given a name nonetheless: Continuum.

Stoneham journeyed on.

Now he was aboard a train, heading for somewhere called Capa Douf.

Now he was on a bus, lumbering through lush green valleys towards X'sarné.

Now he was in a hired car, driving across a vast volcanic plain like a section of moonscape brought to earth.

One thousand miles ahead: Fathomopolis.

Now a boat. Then a plane. Then a train again. Then another plane.

Time zones ceased to matter. Jet lag? Irrelevant. A nagging undertow of tiredness, that was all. Familiar and bearable. Stoneham had burned out his body's circadian rhythm years ago. A few gruelling weeks and it was gone. Now he just went along with whatever hour of the day it happened to be where he was staying. Lived in the moment. Adapted.

Onwards.

On.

And then the girl again, and a grinding, shuddering halt.

The fire broke out in the laundry room, it was established later. What actually started it was never determined, at least not before Stoneham left Verradon. A faulty electrical contact in a tumble dryer? Or arson? Stoneham had his own theories.

Happily, no one died. The flames swept swiftly up through the Hotel Grant Roial, but at the first whiff of fumes a smoke detector was triggered and alarms sounded. The evacuation of the building was textbook. Everybody out in less than seven minutes. On the street, faces illuminated by flickering orange light, the guests huddled in nightwear, slippers, hotel-monogrammed towels and bathrobes. One man had rushed outdoors nude. His blushes were partly spared by a jacket lent him by a night concierge, which he tied around his waist by its sleeves, like an apron.

Flames and smoke were churning out of the lower-storey windows when the firefighters arrived. They soon brought the blaze under control. Crowds had gathered in the roadway to watch. Water sizzled and hissed on charred brickwork, on blistered wood. Stoneham had had the presence of mind to grab his passport and his Passepartout before he left his room, and these were his only remaining material possessions. His room was one of those gutted by the fire. The hotel was saved, the damage limited, but Stoneham now had no clothes other than the pyjamas and dressing gown he was standing in; no cash; no ticket to his next destination, Rubàna Koss. All of those could be replaced, of course. He had his Passepartout. He had his *life*. Nevertheless...

The vulture thought circled.

Slowed.

Again.

Damn it.

The firefighters kept their hoses at the ready, just in case. Emergency vehicle lights flashed brilliant blue off building façades. A paramedic team loitered by their ambulance, nothing to do. The crowd of onlookers remained. An extinguished fire was still a fire. Maybe it would flare up again.

Someone in the crowd was staring at Stoneham. He noticed her all of a sudden. The instant their gazes met she turned away; tried to shrink in among the bodies around her. Immediately he was running. Barefoot over granite. The crowd saw him coming and thought he was

crazy. He battled through their ranks. Come here! Where are you? I saw you!

But the elfin girl had disappeared again. It was dark. The mill of people. He stood no chance of finding her.

He was the city's police commissioner, polite but pompous. A bushy, self-important moustache. One of the most artless comb-overs Stoneham had ever seen, as if the man knew about his baldness but was not altogether sure how to deal with it. Chubby. Dark-green uniform with epaulettes. He was one of Verradon's top-ranking functionaries, and a bureaucrat through and through.

In Furstlant, the country of which Verradon was the capital, they spoke a dialect of English, a distant cousin of the language. Conversation with the commissioner was therefore stilted but possible. The commissioner was appropriately appalled – “appalt” – by the fire at the Grant Roial. He expressed regret that a distinguished traveller such as Mr Stoneham should have had his belongings incinerated and, if this was not being too melodramatic, his life endangered. He promised Mr Stoneham that everything would be done to ensure that such an incident was never repeated. But as for this girl...

“Zis girl.” The commissioner again studied the sketch artist's impression, drawn according to Stoneham's description. As close a resemblance as any artist's impression could manage. “Yuh huv proof zat she iz rezponzial fuh ze fire?”

“No, not exactly. But I know she's been following me. I've seen her before. Twice.” (Three times?) “And I don't believe she's a Fogg.”

“If not uh Fogg, zen...?”

“Then I can only assume she's after me for a reason. And not a good reason.”

“She iz uh Fix.”

“I can only assume so.”

“She deliberately wantz to Zlow yuh.”

“All the way back to zero, if she can.”

The commissioner sat back. Licked a thumb. Sighed. “If zis is suh, if she iz not uh local, zen I um at uh limit tuh what I can do. Uh Fix is beyont muh jurisdickle.”

“But if she's still in Verradon you can find her, arrest her.”

“Azzuming she zet ze fire, wuh do not know she dud. And azzuming she is ztill in Verradon, which is unlikelyal.”

Apologetic, straightforward, intransigent, the commissioner spread his hands and shrugged at Stoneham. *We are both important men. Men of stature. But in these circumstances what can one do?*

Should have known it was no use. Should have know it would be a waste of time. But at least he had tried.

In a bar just around the corner from the police headquarters, Stoneham reviewed the situation.

He was wearing clothes borrowed from the manager of the Hotel Charldon, to where he had been transferred in the small hours of this morning.

He had a small amount of local currency, also borrowed from the Charldon's manager.

He was Slowing. Could feel it – like a drug wearing off. And he had a Fix on his tail.

For some reason he had been targeted by one of those attention-seekers, those human anchors. Probably because he had been so close to Continuum. That made him big game. A scalp worth hunting. The girl would bring him to a standstill if she could, if he let her. Down through the levels till he was back where he had started seven years ago. And then she would crow about it to her cronies, and squeeze every drop of notoriety she could from it. *I stopped a Fogg*. It was a challenge to them. Sport. Envy played a part, too. You had to have money to be a Fogg. Stoneham had accumulated millions, starting out as a fund manager, helping make others rich, then using the skills he developed, the market savvy, to make *himself* rich. His wealth was all his own work. He had begun with next to nothing and built it up into a very substantial Something. But that made no difference to certain people. You had money: you had to be brought low.

The girl had been reconnoitring. Had posed as a whore in Prihody Mishkarov (the soldier an accomplice?). As a holidaymaker in Karakuchon. Perhaps she had been dogging him before then but he had not spotted her. Last night, at the Grant Roial, she had finally acted. Or maybe the stomach virus he had contracted – maybe that had been her doing as well. A drink, a piece of cutlery contaminated with a bacillus. It was not beyond the realms of possibility.

He mulled the problem over, sipping at a glass of yeasty Furstlant beer. But really he was not mulling. What he was doing was nerving himself up for the inevitable.

It took guts to Slow on purpose. It went absolutely against the grain. It felt like disobeying a parental edict – *don't touch that pan of boiling water, don't go into the medicine cabinet*. Instinct rebelled. Physiology rebelled. Choosing a downmarket destination actually induced nausea in Stoneham. Travelling there was no better. He arrived at San Barcino in a cold sweat, with a lump in the back of his throat that he could not swallow down. Once this had been a spectacular city, you could tell. Vibrant. Twenty-four-hour. Now: lost and old and succumbing to crime and vermin. A cloud settled over Stoneham's soul. Things were only going to get worse.

Palgray. Like every superannuated British seaside resort rolled into one, perched at the edge of a vast, leaden inland lake. Bursts of liveliness here and there, but the closed-down shops and restaurants outnumbered the open, and the residents outnumbered the visitors.

Fantolo. It nestled in a jungle, it belonged in a jungle. Creepers wrapped over stucco. Scarlet geckos darting up and down walls. A trillion biting and stinging insects in the humid, whining air.

Tabur. Situated high on a featureless steppe and scoured by winds all day and all night. There was no building sufficiently free of chinks that the icy blasts could not get in. There might be a corner of a room here, a hearthside there, that afforded sanctuary and warmth – but invariably it had been commandeered by a local.

Staltenburg. Here a revolution had recently taken place, a military coup which, while broadly welcomed by the populace, had yet to prove itself as an unequivocally positive development. No one knew if the generals could run things in any less corrupt a manner than the politicians they had ousted. Thus an atmosphere of uncertainty, a harried feeling of *Have we made the right decision?*

Prihody Mishkarov again. Christ, this place again.

Tortorena. A neon-lit, drug-fuelled inferno. Fabulous if you were nineteen and your idea of fun was three days without sleep, drinking till you puked then drinking some more, dancing yourself into a pharmaceutical frenzy in eardrum-splitting discos, catching a venereal disease.

Gentuba. On this island you could get knifed for looking at somebody the wrong way. Signs in the hotel lobbies advised staying within the hotel compound; eating only at the hotel restaurant; going on sightseeing tours only if accompanied by a hotel-approved armed guard.

Stoneham downshifted, downshifted, and soon every form of transportation he took was a potential deathtrap. Every car grumbled along on perished tyres. Every train swayed as if it was going to tumble off the rails at any moment. Every aeroplane was a triumph of prayer over gravity. Every boat was a *Titanic* waiting to happen.

At last, somewhere in the upper reaches of the lower levels, recognizable names began appearing in the travel brochures. Sometimes they were distortions of the familiar: Mokvow, Las Vehas, Attens, Baiying, Conberra. Mostly they were familiar: Berlin, Oslo, Acapulco, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Christchurch.

And finally, there it was: London.

A grey morning at Heathrow as Stoneham disembarked after an eleven-hour flight from somewhere not unlike Delhi. He felt coarse, rumpled, gritty. His eyeballs too large for their sockets. A customs official who looked as though she had never smiled in her life inspected his passport, then fixed him with a contemptuous stare. What kind of Fogg was he, to be down here in London? What kind of loser? She all but flung the passport back to him.

"It is good to see you again, Bob," said McWilliam, "but I don't really understand what you expect me to do."

Stoneham rubbed his stubbled chin. "Stop her, Chris. I don't know how, but just... stop her. Get her off my back."

The Fogg Society Bureau was located just off the Strand. A seven-storey terraced building, thin like a cigarette. Inside: low lighting and flock wallpaper, oak panelling and shelves of leather-bound books, in the manner of a Victorian gentlemen's club. McWilliam's office looked out onto a theatre and an Italian restaurant. On the wall hung a large framed photo of Julian Vernon. Long gone. The first man to gain Speed. The first man to vanish into Continuum. Between which pioneering feats he had founded the Society. A rallying point for other individuals like him: the very wealthy, those seeking something new, something more, something sublime.

McWilliam tapped his fingers on his spotless desktop blotter. "That's easy enough to ask but impossible to do. You can't just send cops after her. Nice if you could, but

even if the law was on our side, which it's not, proving malicious intent is... You don't need me to tell you any of this."

"She must have come from this level, though. If we could somehow find out where she lives."

"The Epping Forest solution, eh? Send the boys round?"

Stoneham shook his head, acknowledging the unfeasibility of what he was suggesting.

"I suppose what I *could* do," McWilliam said, "is ring the Fix Fund and beg them politely to call her off."

"Think that'll work?"

"Not a hope. I can tell you now, their reply will consist of two single-syllable words, the second being 'you'. But if you want me to all the same, I'll do it."

"What I want is..." Stoneham's eyes were burning. He had not realized how near to tears he was. Pure frustration. He growled: "It's not fair, Chris! It's not fucking fair! I had it in my reach. I was *this* far from it."

"Continuum?"

"I'm certain of it. I could feel..." It was hard to put into words. "Like I was dancing on the very tip of the world. A short sidestep, and I'd be off. Everyone around me seemed to be in slow motion. Everyone seemed to be locked into a predestined course. No choice about anything. But I wasn't. There was infinite possibility for me. I was breaking free. A few more days, a few more hours even, and I'd have done it. I swear."

"I believe you." McWilliam looked wistful. "I do believe you, Bob. And I think the only answer is to keep trying. If you were close once you can get close again. You mustn't let this girl stop you. If you allow her to fuck things up for you, other Fixes will join in. Blood in the water. You'll never be free of them. There'll be more hotel fires. There'll be bomb threats that cancel flights. Tickets that go missing. Your name erased from passenger manifests. Double-booked seats. Bogus cab drivers taking you to the wrong airport. Bribed customs officials waylaying you on technicalities. Your life will become a nightmare. But at the moment there's only one of them after you, and you can beat her. I know you can. Just stay ahead of her. Out-think her. Buy tickets to two destinations – that's a useful trick. She can't follow you to *both* places. Check into two hotels, use a false name. She'll have a harder time finding you. You can trip her up just as she can trip you up. I have confidence in you, Bob. You can shake her off if you really want to."

It was good to hear. It was no less than he had expected of McWilliam. It gave him a small fillip. But it was not the only reason he had returned to London.

Joanna's ashes had been sprinkled over a corner of the garden of remembrance at the Green Lawns Cemetery just outside Guildford. A tree had been planted there in her name. A silver birch, now twelve feet tall, whitely spreading its wings. There was a brass plaque on a small concrete plinth set into the ground at its base: JOANNA STONEHAM.

The sun was out. Dappled leaf-shadows danced on the grass. Stoneham stood, head bowed. For a long time after Joanna's death he had wanted to believe that somehow

she was here, in the soil, in the silver birch, the atoms of which she had been composed infusing this spot, constituting a presence. He knew better now. Joanna did not exist any more. But here, nonetheless, was the last point on Earth she had physically touched before dissipating into nothingness. Here, if anywhere, was her spirit.

Speed was what killed her. Not Speed. The other kind. The normal kind. Velocity. A car travelling at sixty miles an hour along a road slick with rain. Some moron of a driver who lost control coming round a bend, crossed the median line, collided head-on with Joanna in her Volkswagen. The Volkswagen's steering wheel embedding itself in her ribcage. Six days on life-support, bathed in the green glow of monitor screens, as though under water, softly drowned. On the seventh day the doctors left it up to him. There was no hope for her. They had done all they could do.

It was not as simple as turning off a switch. It was simpler. He only had to nod.

"I haven't been running away from you, Jo," he told the birch, the grass, the sunlit air. "Maybe it looks that way but I haven't. I couldn't stay, that's all. The world was too small after you'd gone. Too full of reminders. If I've been running anywhere, it's in the opposite direction. Not away from but towards."

He half-expected to hear someone say *amen*.

He and McWilliam met again, this time at the Italian restaurant that was visible from McWilliam's office. Over spaghetti vongole McWilliam said, "I hope you won't be annoyed but I got in touch with the Fix Fund anyway."

"And?"

"Well, I got through to Weatherall" – Jon Weatherall, managing director of the Fund, a former student radical who, in middle age, had evolved into a sharp-suited and urbane establishment gadfly – "and after putting up with several minutes of shit from him I convinced him to talk straight. He doesn't know her."

"Or says he doesn't."

"Or says he doesn't. But I think I believe him. I described her to him the way you described her to me. Instantly he said, 'She's not one of ours.'"

"You didn't tell him about... about me?"

"Of course not." An injured tone. *We're old friends, aren't we, Bob? You think I'd do that?* "I referred to 'a member of the Society'. I think Weatherall and I have an understanding. A bit like spymasters during the Cold War. Both playing the game. However..."

Stoneham peered across the small table. There was a half-emptied Rioja bottle between them, a long-stemmed rose in a vase, a tea-light.

"You probably shouldn't have Slowed back down here, Bob," McWilliam said. "They do keep an eye on the Bureau. The Fixes. They've probably seen you go in and out."

"So?"

"As I said yesterday: blood in the water. They'll have scented that you're in trouble."

"I'd better be careful then."

"You better had. Perhaps you should consider –" McWilliam stopped himself.

"Giving up?"

"Or postponing starting again, at any rate."

"No way. I can beat them. You told me so."

The conversation moved on. They talked for a while as experienced travellers will, swapping anecdotes. Escapades had. Places stayed. Weirdos met. Then, as the dessert course arrived, tiramisu, McWilliam said: "You really came close?"

"I don't know. I could have imagined it, I suppose. I mean, how do you tell? No one who's found Continuum has returned to give the rest of us an authoritative description, and those who've got close all talk about it in different terms. All I can say is I'd never felt anything like it before in seven years of hard travelling."

"Have you ever had a religious experience?"

"No."

"I always imagined it would be something like that."

Imagined. Such implicit sorrow and bitterness in McWilliam's use of the past tense. Stoneham observed the grey hair at his temples, the pouchiness of his eyes, the fattened veins in his hands. McWilliam wore his disappointment as well as could be expected; he seemed to have adjusted. But there it was: he had been deemed unworthy of the great prize of Continuum. All the money he had accrued – a large chain of mobile-phone outlets, sold at a good price at the right time – but for some reason the one thing he wanted most of all had been denied him. Perhaps the harder you chased Continuum, the less likely you were to attain it.

"You're lucky," McWilliam said.

"Possibly."

London was clogged. Stoneham – full belly, somewhat drunk – breathed in the old fumes, the brown stench of centuries of human industry. Car horns tooted, buses growled, cyclists whizzed by. It was dusk. Tomorrow: Gatwick, and it would all begin again. He stopped on Southwark Bridge. Leaned on the parapet. The Thames rubbed along below, bumping at its banks. Pedestrians trod to and fro behind him. He watched them out of the corner of his eye. Was he a Fix? Was she? Were the whole lot of them after him now?

Blood in the water, McWilliam had said.

Blood on my hands, Stoneham thought, recalling the dream. The dream and that sense that at some point in his life he had committed a terrible crime. He had not. He had been, and was, by any standards a blameless man. This phantom guilt – Joanna? Even an accidental death leaves the bereaved feeling somehow responsible. She was driving home from a visit to her mother. He had not accompanied her. A Saturday, but still some paperwork to catch up on, and he and his mother-in-law did not get along that well. Relations between them were cordial but not friendly. If he had gone, would Joanna still be alive? Or would they both have died?

He was culpable only in retrospect. Innocent until fate had proved him guilty.

He had taken a room at the Savoy. He walked there now, a little unsteady on his feet.

The next day: Gatwick. And it all began again.

Even as he clambered up through the levels, it was hard to dispel the impression that he was being pursued. Every fellow passenger was a potential Fix. Every delay, however minor and ultimately inconsequential, seemed part of some larger, orchestrated plan. Faces recurred time and time again around him, or seemed to. He saw a man with a highly distinctive hat at no fewer than three different locations. He saw the hat, anyway; the wearer might not always have been the same man. There was a hugely overweight woman, too, who was a fixture at a number of hotels he stayed in – but then hugely overweight people tend to look alike. There was the skinny chap with sallow cheeks and reptilian eyes who kept staring at him across the aisle of a train carriage. The man's expression was inquisitive, insinuating. Eventually Stoneham got up and moved to another carriage. Later, the man moved to that carriage too. Stoneham changed carriages again. Then there was the married couple with the teenage son, an obnoxious brat who whinged and whined throughout the length of a bus trip. This trio reappeared a few days later on another leg of Stoneham's travels, a ferry crossing. The teenage boy was still whingeing and whining. A married couple – Fixes? Unlikely. In fact, ludicrous.

Nevertheless...

Even if he was wrong about these particular individuals, there *were* Fixes behind him. Following him. He could all but feel their breath on the back of his neck. He utilized all the tricks McWilliam suggested. It made life laborious. It added effort, hindered Speed. It made his travels travails. The worrying did not help. It was hard to build up any sense of progress, of flow, what with constantly having to look over his shoulder, constantly having to second-guess potential saboteurs. He had never felt quite so unlikely to achieve Continuum. If it beckoned, would he be in a fit state of mind – receptive, unpreoccupied – to recognize it?

After several weeks Stoneham had re-entered the upper levels and was beginning to relax. Nothing untoward had happened. No serious voyaging mishaps. The sense of being hunted had faded. Perhaps he had succeeded in eluding the Fixes (if there had been any Fixes in the first place). Certainly he had not once spotted the girl. Not so much as a glimpse of her. Which *per se* did not mean anything. Could be she had got better at hiding, at disguising herself. But somehow he was sure he had given her the slip. McWilliam had been right: *you can beat her*.

Speed became increasingly easy to obtain. Worrying about Fixes had been a dragging weight attached to his ankle. Unshackled from it, he lurched forwards, stored-up momentum released. Plane became boat. Boat became train. Train became car became plane again. Hotel after hotel after hotel. Another departure lounge, another railway-station waiting room. His Passepartout double-tasking: primed to alert him when his next destination was announced over the tannoy, in the meantime translating the text of a guide book or a newspaper. The incremental improvement in standards of comfort and cleanliness: one country's second class being the previous one's first class;

one hotel's extras being the next's inclusions; every new city boasting tidier, lighter, brighter streets; a heightening of stranger-kindness; a reduction in stranger-hostility. Stoneham unclenched. He was in transit. He was free.

And then one morning he woke up and he knew. A tingle inside. It was happening.

A universal languor seemed to have settled in around him. People talking, gesturing, moving, ever so slightly too slowly. Voices out of synch with their mouths, trailing behind, as though the air had grown thicker, impeding the speed of sound. A waiter at breakfast, pouring orange juice as though it were syrup. A cab driver, chauffeuring Stoneham to the airport at a leisurely pace, with no sense that they were going to be late. Nothing seemed wholly real. The world's tangible certainties were gone. Stoneham found himself laying a hand on things, checking their texture, reassuring himself of their solidity. His plane glided high into the unturbulent blue. The flight attendants smiled as they distributed hot towels and drinks like ministers at mass, calm, beneficent. Everything was unfurling, and would always unfurl, at this gentle, measured rate.

Stoneham arrived and stayed and left, arrived and stayed and left, and his stopovers clicked into place one after another like the final few pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, that one able to fit there, that one with nowhere else to go but there. He marvelled at the orderliness of life. The pattern to it. All of it was meant. Even the bad parts like Joanna's death. If not for that, he would never have become a Fogg. If not for becoming a Fogg, he would never have attained the sense of perspective he had now. He was above sorrow, climbing up above grief. The hole torn in him by losing Joanna was still there, but he perceived it as not an absence but a doorway. It had enabled him to step through into another kind of existence. Her parting gift to him.

He was in a city the colour of ivory, steeples and pinacles and minarets slivering the sky.

He was in a city that floated a thousand feet in the air, an agglomeration of airships and balloons linked together in graceful symbiotic unity like a jellyfish.

He was in a city where apartment blocks and office towers were tunnelled out of the trunks of Cyclopean, cloud-piercing trees, an urban forest, thick boughs serving as streets.

He was in a city whose boroughs were vast, vaulted chambers, lit he could not tell how, their ceilings vanishingly high yet covered, as he saw for himself, with painted illustrations of remarkable detail.

He was in a city like the mechanism of an immense clock, houses built in rings atop interlocking brass cogs that revolved gradually throughout the day, pedestrian journeys conditional upon the correct meshing of teeth.

Nearer and nearer: the knowing, the conviction.

He was in a city that was carved from an entire mountain, a piece of hand-hewn filigree that had been centuries in the making, a human-scale termitary in effect, with shafts sunk to its lower streets for ventilation and illumination, cool throughout but never cold, every wall revealing a multiplicity of geological strata – veiny lay-

ers of quartz, patches of rust-coloured iron ore, glittering black coal seams, even diamonds – and there was a bar on one of its deepest thoroughfares and Stoneham was leaving it after a glass or two of sumptuous wine, and he was making his way to a restaurant his hotel concierge had recommended, and the street was broad and people were walking with that somnambulist gait he was accustomed to seeing now, and there was a copper tinge to the light and a smell like roast almonds in the air, and every face that passed him seemed aglow, filled with some rapturous inner radiance, and it was only a matter of time now, surely only a matter of time before Continuum reached out for him and enfolded him, and whatever it was, whatever form it took, he was ready for it, he was ready to rise up and disappear, he was at peace with himself and the world; and following the concierge's directions he turned down an alleyway and there were two men here, leaning against a wall, just chatting, idling away the time, and he went by them and nodded to them and they nodded to him, and then he was lying on the ground, rough stone against his cheek and heat searing across the back of his head, and someone was kicking him and someone else was rummaging in his jacket pockets, searching for his wallet, his Passepartout, finding them both, pulling them out, and the person kicking him kept kicking him, trying to break something, and there was pain, altogether too much of it, and he could not understand what this was about, he could not understand why this was happening to him in this hollowed-mountain city, this piece of scrimshaw so large only God could appreciate it in its entirety, why he was being mugged and beaten, and suddenly no one was kicking him any more and he heard scuffling, the sounds of a struggle, and he tried to get up but he was too dizzy and the parts of his body where he had been kicked were stiff and tight, and he looked up and the girl was bending over him, the girl, the Fix girl, she must be the one who had arranged this, but then she was reaching down to him, extending a hand, and she said: "You're safe now."

Stoneham croaked something in reply.

Then another voice, one he knew but took a moment to place: "Oh, for fuck's sake."

McWilliam? What was McWilliam doing here?

The girl helped him to his feet. He did not have much choice but to let her. For someone so slenderly built, she was surprisingly strong. He leaned his weight on her – it was that or collapse – and she supported him with ease.

At the far end of the alleyway: McWilliam, looking irritated, looking aggrieved. Between him and Stoneham: the two men, the two alleyway-idlers-turned-muggers. Both lay prostrate, injured, one unconscious, the other writhing and gasping. McWilliam regarded them balefully, a master displeased with his servants. Then he directed his gaze at Stoneham.

"You led us quite a chase, Bob."

This was not the McWilliam he had last seen, the sympathetic counsellor in London. This was another McWilliam, with a cruel, surly twist to his mouth. This was not a man concerned over Stoneham's welfare. This was anything but.

"I thought we'd never catch up with you."

"Chris?" Stoneham scarcely recognized his own voice. A parched thing, scratchy with pain.

"But then I'm not a bad Fogg. Just an unlucky one. So here we are. And these two useless idiots..." McWilliam sneered at the men on the ground. "Couldn't even pull off a simple mugging, could they? They told me they'd have no trouble handling it. Take your stuff, a broken rib or leg – no problem. Obviously they overestimated themselves. Or underestimated you."

"I didn't –"

"I was watching. You put up quite a fight. Where did you learn moves like that?"

"But I didn't –"

"Damn it, Bob." McWilliam stepped around the two men, coming closer. "Couldn't you take a hint? I told you to postpone starting again. But oh no, you just had to go. Couldn't wait to be back in transit."

Stoneham glanced at the girl beside him. She was staring daggers at McWilliam. He, in return, was ignoring her completely. Whose side was she on?

"It's the truth, isn't it?" McWilliam said. "You just can't help yourself. You're obsessed. You'll chase Continuum till it kills you. That's what happens, I reckon. Those Fogs who've vanished? They travelled till they dropped; got buried somewhere in the upper levels, somewhere where no one knew them. Somebody'll find a grave eventually. Maybe even Julian Vernon's grave. It'll happen. And then this whole stupid farce will come to an end."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" said Stoneham, finally starting to twig. "That way nobody will have what you couldn't have. Fucking dog in the manger."

McWilliam was now less than half a dozen yards away. "I don't want anything that's as worthless as this – this *fantasy* you're after."

"You need to believe it's a fantasy. Otherwise you'll have to accept that you failed."

"You've failed, Bob. Continuum is a lie."

"I know Continuum exists. I'm nearly there."

"No, you only think you are. Seven years you've been in transit. It's time to admit defeat. Call it a day."

"Just a sidestep away, Chris. I know I'm going to make it this time. And you can't stop me. You or anyone."

McWilliam heaved a sigh. "I had a feeling you might say that. I was really hoping it wouldn't have to come down to this."

Stoneham barely glimpsed the knife being drawn. Suddenly it was in McWilliam's hand. A local artefact. The handle basalt, intricately carved. He had seen similar carving on display in one of the city's museums. Similar knives on sale at several craft boutiques.

McWilliam stepped towards him. A cold glint in his eyes: envy that had curdled into something much worse, a pathological resentment.

"I hate this," he said.

The knife blade stabbed forwards, aimed at Stoneham's chest.

Stoneham –

the girl will save me

– reacted a split-second too late. He felt the blade

enter him, sheathing itself in him to the hilt. Deep. Cold. Oddly painless.

Then the girl did become involved. Or someone did. As McWilliam withdrew the knife from Stoneham, pulling it back for a second thrust, hands grabbed his hand. There was a momentary tussle. The knife, vertical, trembling in the air like the needle of a speedometer. Then abrupt acceleration, the knife flattening out. Plunging into McWilliam.

Shocked and bleeding, the two men reeled apart. Both clutching their wounds, they stared at each other across the width of the alleyway. Then, as if choreographed, both slumped back against opposite walls.

McWilliam attempted to speak, but only blood came out, not words.

Stoneham could not speak at all.

McWilliam's legs gave way. He crumpled, still not quite able to believe the news his body was sending him.

Stoneham felt the same. He remained upright, but the information was coming in thick and fast: *Things are not working. You're broken. You're leaking. You're a cracked vessel, a burst balloon. Breath is going. Heart surrendering.* He looked down at his hands, and the blood that gloved them ignited a tiny spark of déjà vu.

Where had this happened before? When?

A death.

He had known about this moment. Dreamed about it. He saw himself in the red-light district in Prihody Mishkarov.

In the restaurant at Karakuchon.

Night-clothed on the street outside the burning Grant Roial in Verradon.

Saw himself as though at one remove, through someone else's eyes.

Saw himself now, pitifully soaked in his own blood. Grey-faced, pale-lipped.

Then the girl.

She smiled at him.

"Come with me."

Where to?

It did not matter. An offer to go somewhere – how could a Fogg refuse?

She walked, he followed, and the city that was also a mountain became as evanescent as a cloud.

James Lovegrove's most recent novel is *The Foreigners* (Gollancz, September 2000), and his previous stories for *Interzone* include "The Driftling" (issue 121) and "Terminal Event" (issue 150). He lives in Lewes, East Sussex.

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You Want Me to Kill a Dragon? Okay, What's in It For Me?

Juliet McKenna
interviewed by
Molly Brown



“**W**hat publishers are all looking for is ‘the same but different’: something that can be sold to the book trade and the public as something they are familiar with, yet which has some element to lift it above all the other books competing for attention.”

Hearing that statement in a lecture must have started a chorus of bells ringing in Juliet McKenna’s head (and if it didn’t, it should have); after an early false start with an unpublished fantasy blockbuster, she had found her niche in the fiction market-place at last.

She duly set out to write something “the same but different” and came up with a fantasy series set in a world called Einarinn (a conglomeration of quasi-medieval states with names like Tormalin, Solura, Lescar and Caladhria). Einarinn is home to a varied collection of characters, including Ryshad (“sworn man” to a Tormalin prince), Halice (a female mercenary soldier), Sorgrad and Sorgren (a pair of brothers with a dangerous combination of few morals, volatile temperaments and unex-

pected powers), and wizards with names like Shiv and Usara.

Based on the above, you could be forgiven for thinking this sounds like almost any standard sword-and-sorcery world, so where did the “different” bit come in? With the introduction of a red-haired gambler and part-time thief named Livak. “I read a great deal of crime fiction and I kept coming back to the notion of dropping the independently minded female P.I. into heroic fantasy. In my initial submissions, I presented Livak as a sister under the skin of V. I. Warshawski, Kinsey Milhone and Kate Brannigan. What I was offering was the same style of character, different genre; or seen from the reverse angle: same genre, different style of protagonist.”

This “same but different” approach obviously worked a treat; the first book in the “Einarinn” series, *The Thief’s Gamble*, was published by Orbit in January 1999.

The novel is written in a mix of styles: alternating first- and third-person narrative, interspersed with extracts from letters, poems, plays

and historical documents. Why did she choose this method of storytelling? "Originally *The Thief's Gamble* was solely Livak's story but initial discussions with my editor highlighted some problems with that. Firstly, it made for quite a short book in fantasy terms, and while the first-person style brings a lot in terms of immediacy and pace, you lose other things, most notably chances to give background information without characters solemnly discussing things they must surely already know. The historical extracts were one helpful way of expanding on the passing comments Livak makes along the way and filling in the gaps."

The main first-person thread concerns Livak's unwilling involvement with the wizards of Hadrumal in a battle between two different kinds of magic, with lots of fight scenes, sexual intrigue and even a couple of mind invasions (in which the victim is taken over by another's will) along the way. Alongside this is a sub-plot following the misadventures of an arrogant student magician named Casuel. "Adding the sub-plot was the next decision, to give added depth and an additional perspective for the reader as well as clarifying the wizardly shenanigans Livak's narrative only hinted at. I felt this had to be in the third-person as two first-person narratives within the same book threatened endless scope for confusion for both reader and writer."

"Once I embarked on that strategy, it came together very well, helping with pacing the book and adding new complexity. It worked so well, I've used the same approach in the subsequent books."

Her second novel, *The Swordsman's Oath*, appeared in November of 1999. This time, the first person narration comes from Ryshad, the "sworn man" to whom honour is everything (and who, by the end of book one, has become Livak's latest lover). "My main fear with that book was that I would somehow find myself writing the same story again and I was determined to avoid that. Given Livak lives very much on the fringes of society, focusing on Ryshad gave me the chance to look at an insider as opposed to an outsider, a man rather than a woman, someone with roots and a solid sense of background rather than a wanderer."

The action of the story is still driven by the continued threat posed by the mind-bending "aetheric magic" of the Elietimm (a mysterious race apparently intent on world domination), and there are still a lot of fight scenes, but a large chunk of the novel is devoted to Ryshad's experience of being captured and sold into slavery on the semi-tropical Aldabreshin Archipelago, where as the "body slave" of the

youngest and prettiest wife of a local war-lord, his duties include the bathing and dressing of a full-grown woman, as well as doing her hair and make-up. (And as there doesn't seem to be any requirement for Aldabreshi women's male body slaves to be made into eunuchs, Ryshad's tasks soon include much more intimate services than hairdressing.)

"When I decided to start writing as an antidote to full-time motherhood, one of the main reasons I opted for fantasy was that I knew I could draw on my own historical knowledge – and the vast number of books we have in the house. Research beyond that with a toddler and a baby in tow was clearly going to be a complete non-starter."

"Those resources carried me through *The Thief's Gamble*, but by the time I was working on *The Swordsman's Oath*, I was doing research to underpin the background I had sketched in for Livak, to find detail to give colour and atmosphere and to find new material, in particular for the Aldabreshin culture."

"I looked into slavery as a historical phenomenon and used attitudes common in the classical world, rather than the abolitionist, moral objections that developed in the 18th Century and were closely tied to religious movements and philosophy that have no parallels in Einarinn."

By book three, *The Gambler's Fortune* (August 2000), we're back with Livak as she once again agrees to aid the wizards of Hadrumal in the battle against the Elietimm, this time aided by her good friends Sorgren and Sorgrad, the borderline psychopathic brothers. ("Psychopathic? That's not a word Livak would recognize and I don't suppose anyone else in Einarinn would either," Juliet protested at my use of that word in describing the violent and unpredictable brothers. "The harshness inherent in Mountain culture and climate is going to foster fairly uncompromising attitudes and when you combine this with personalities admittedly from the far end of the spectrum, you end up with two very successful mercenaries." Besides which, "However dangerous they might be as allies, that's still preferable to having them against you." I guess I stand corrected.)

The relationship between Livak and the brothers goes back a long way before book one of the series; the three of them started out as characters in a live role-playing game. "Livak in particular is largely based on a character my pal Helen was playing in one scenario I wrote. Sorgrad and 'Gren, who are central to *The Gambler's Fortune*, were characters my husband Steve was running. This trio were certainly the origin of Livak's rather flexible morality."

Juliet's long involvement in gaming has been the major influence on her fiction. "Role-playing games – both tabletop and live-action – had given me ideas for a different way of writing a high fantasy adventure. I'd been reading rather too many solitary heroes struggling against the odds and their hidden sorrows, alternating with naïve young protagonists finding themselves going off on an adventure with the usual supporting cast of lovable rogues, wise (and beautiful) older women, feisty yet virginal heroines and the ancient sage or wizard that everyone always agrees with in the end."

"All of these were a world away from my experiences writing and running scenarios for a highly modified version of AD&D and for a Live Role-Play club. The actual details of the games aren't particularly relevant; they were standard one-size-fits-all fantasy settings and tasks, but what kept prodding me was seeing people much of an age and with comparable skills working together as a team – and not always agreeing on the best way to do something, working through adjustments and compromises."

"I was also seeing motivation to succeed coming far more from any individual's personal goals than from noble, selfless desire for the greater good. The more I thought about it, the more I could see a strand of realism that could be woven into a fantasy tale to good effect. 'You want me to kill a dragon? Okay, what's in it for me... besides first pick of the treasure?'"

"Live Role-Playing in particular tends to highlight practical issues. There's nothing like walking through a dark wood with a candle lantern and having six-foot orcs leap out of the bushes at you to give a very real sense of fighting for your life, even if it is only with foam and latex swords. In the middle of a sword fight, you are concentrating on not getting skewered and can have no idea what the cunning mage behind you might be planning. I also practise the martial art Aikido in a traditional style that includes sword and staff work, so that gives me another set of insights."

Another game plot element that found its way into her books is the battle between elemental and aetheric magic. "The notion of having two sorts of magic goes back to my gaming days when both AD&D and the LRP system we ran had wizards on the one hand and clerics or their equivalent on the other. In Live Role-Playing in particular, various conflicts and contradictions would emerge from having two magic systems running in parallel and I found working through the logic of these highly thought-provoking. So when I came to consider the implica-

tions of real magic for a novel, I wondered where is it written that there can be only one sort of magic per world, as in so much fantasy fiction? I could see definite possibilities in a world with two kinds of magic – and the most dramatic was taking a point where the arrival or re-emergence of one sort comes as an unwelcome surprise to the practitioners of the other.

“Everyone getting along famously might be an admirable aim for real life, but it wouldn’t make for a very exciting book. I also liked the idea of having wizards discover they were not nearly as omniscient as they had previously thought. To enhance the conflict, I made the elemental magic of Planir and Hadrumal almost scientific in outlook, concerned with the practical and the provable, while the aetheric magic relies on intangible concepts like belief and unprovable skills akin to telepathy. That alone seemed likely to make mages antagonistic, even before factoring in human tendencies to distrust the unknown and the insult felt by mages suddenly faced with powers to rival their own. When I added in practical and ideological reasons for the Elietimm to be hostile to the mainland in general and elemental magic in particular, I had a nicely volatile mix of plot elements that are gradually being explored as the books progress.”

Translating her experience of devising game scenarios into the writing of novels hasn’t been completely straightforward. “A book needs a coherent narrative structure for a start. In my experience, attempts at linear plots in table-top gaming come to grief so often, when players apply some twisted logic of their own to do

something completely unexpected and send the session haring off down some utterly unforeseen path. That’s all part of the fun, the wise GM goes with the flow and a good time is had by all, but the end result will be no basis for a novel.

“In gaming, you can also skate over shaky logic and use implausible plot devices when you’ve painted yourself into a corner, but these tend to jar a reader’s suspension of disbelief in a book.

“Live Role-Playing is generally most successful when it has a linear plot – and since most gamers will pick holes in every detail you give them, looking for clues – writing those scenarios taught me useful things about how to tie events together, so one leads logically on to the next.

“I know I apply the same rule of thumb of ‘twice as much action as chat’ to my novels as I do to live-action scenarios. But even a live-action scenario lasting six hours is a one-time-only event; a novel needs to stand up to people reading it carefully, several times with any luck, spending time thinking about the characters and events. So I’d say it’s a fairly huge leap from gaming scenarios to novels. There are certainly similarities: the need to balance originality with expectation, to create dramatic situations and challenges; but with a novel, you have to master all the added complexities of dialogue, scene setting, characterization... to name but a few.”

Juliet has a five book contract with her publisher, so there will be definitely be at least two more tales of Einarinn. “I’m still resolutely determined to write self-contained books within an on-going chronology, and

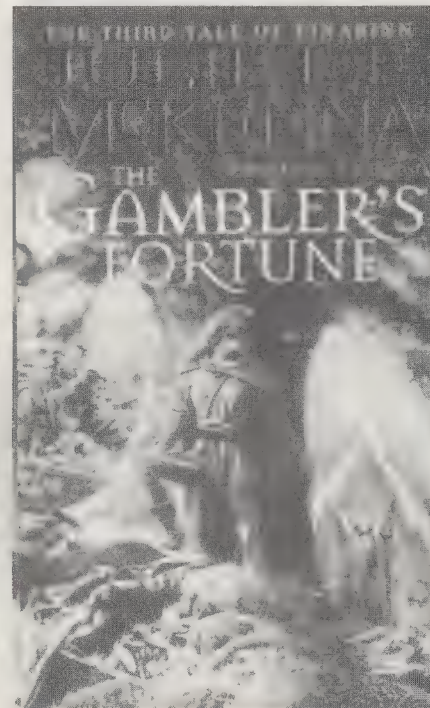
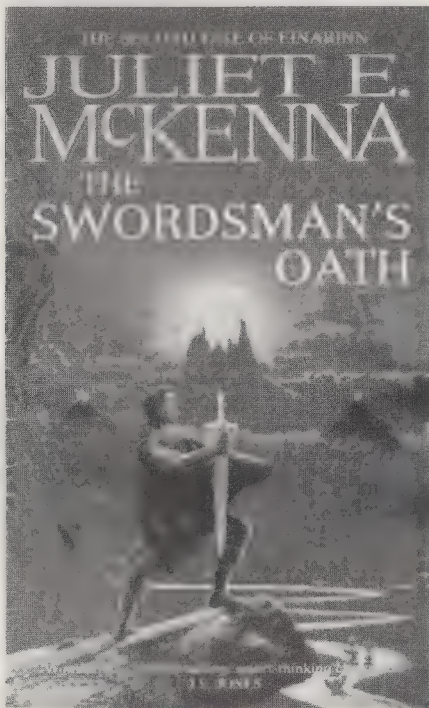
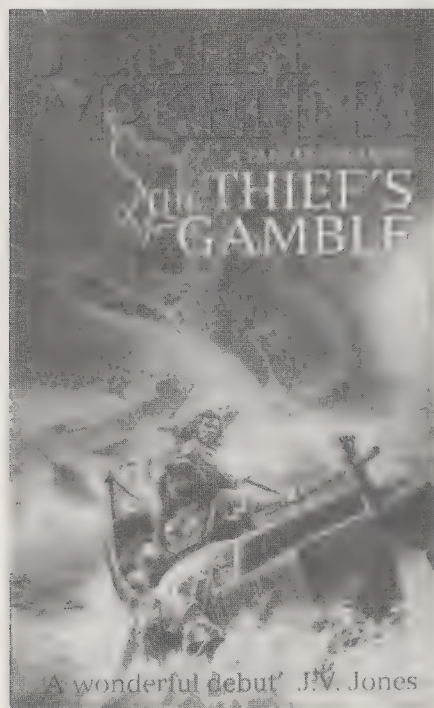
hope to achieve this with books four and five (as yet untitled). I find the challenge I’ve set myself getting more complicated though, since the plots of four and five do arise out of unanswered questions left over from the series thus far.

“In Book Four, Ryshad’s sense of duty means he is looking to help secure the future of the Kellarin colonists. He’s aiming to do this over the Solstice Festival in Toremal, where he is in attendance on his prince and when all the other great Houses of Toremal are gathered to pursue their own interests. By Book Five, Planir, D’Olbriot, Ryshad and Livak are convinced something needs to be done to curb Elietimm ambitions – not that they are necessarily agreed on quite what should be done or who exactly should be doing it. In the meantime, the Elietimm aren’t exactly sitting on their hands either.

“After that? By then, I suspect I’ll have taken this scenario and group of characters about as far as I can for the moment. The next question is not what will I do, but which of the options I’ve got jostling for position should I pursue first? I can see a lot of potential in the Lescar Civil Wars, and then of course, there’s Solura sitting on the edge of the map and largely unexplored. Or I might do something entirely different.”

The Thief’s Gamble, *The Swordsman’s Oath* and *The Gambler’s Fortune* are published by Orbit. More information about Juliet McKenna and her books can be found on her web site at <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/juliet.e.mckenna/>

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You read it here last! Millions of correspondents rushed in the news that whatevsname's next book will be *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*... bad luck for me, since I'd placed a large bet on the 1000-1 outsider *Harry Pooter and the Diary of a Nobody* (by J. K. Grossmith).

THE SINKING PARADE

Simon Ings fervently hopes that *Interzone* readers missed his appearance with writer girlfriend Anna Davis in a *Sunday Times* "Competitive Couples" feature back in October. "Quite an achievement on the part of freelance journalist Amy Anderson in that it managed to be both cloying and spiteful at the same time. And fictitious. 'We laugh and cry about our writing,' apparently. And we sneak into each other's studies to secretly check how much each of us has written each day." Oh, ugh. But there was one big, author-cheering compensation. The photo accompanying the article was of Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman...

Ursula Le Guin responded to Christopher Priest's disparagement of the "cheap laughs" in Thog's Masterclass: "Chris Priest say 'cheap laughs'... Socrates say 'The misuse of language induces evil in the soul'... Ursula say 'Laughing at misuse of language improves quality of soul'... George W. Bush say 'I arrest my case'." Thog would genuflect if he knew what the word meant.

Keith Roberts (1935-2000), best known for his superb alternative history story-cycle *Pavane*, died from pneumonia and bronchitis on 5 October 2000; he was 65. Obituarists had to strike a difficult balance between his fine sf celebrations of the English landscape in beautiful English, the charm, humour and generosity he often showed... and his fatal habit of quarrelling irretrievably with just about everyone who published him or did him a good turn. "Never knew a bloke so determined to destroy himself," wrote Michael Moorcock. Keith Roberts's last years were tragic, with multiple sclerosis bringing hand tremors that ended his other career as a gifted illustrator, while complications led to the amputation of his legs. He remains the only creator to have won the British SF Association Award as a novelist (with the 1987 *Gráinne*), as a short story writer (twice), and as an artist.

Gordon Van Gelder left his part-time editorial position at St Martin's Press (USA) on 20 October, to work full-time as editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and SF* – which he has bought from long-time owner and publisher Edward L. Ferman.

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

James White was remembered at the inaugural James White Award presentation in Dublin on 22 October. Over 100 stories had been submitted for this first award. There were speeches from all and sundry – including Mark Dunn, author of the winning "Think Tank," who besides *Interzone* publication (see *IZ* 162) received a cash prize and a pen-nib-shaped silver trophy. Attendees were particularly taken with the special James White Award beer, a bottled home-brew suitably labelled for the occasion.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Publishers and Sinners. *Dept of Upelevatoring Insights.* Andrew Wheeler of the US SF Book Club confides: "When we saw the manuscript of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, it had obviously been the victim of a perfunctory search & replace Americanization, since characters were always saying things 'apartmently'."

World Fantasy Awards 2000. Novel: Martin Scott, *Thraxas*. Novella: (tie) Jeff VanderMeer, "The Transformation of Martin Lake" (*Palace Corbie* 8), and Laurel Winter, "Sky Eyes" (*F&SF* 3/99). Short: Ian R. MacLeod, "The Chop Girl" (*Asimov's* 12/99). Anthology: Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling (ed), *Silver Birch Blood Moon*. Collection: (tie) Charles de Lint, *Moonlight and Vines*, and Stephen R. Donaldson, *Reave the Just*. Artist: Jason Van Hollander. Special/Professional: Gordon Van Gelder for editing (St Martin's, *F&SF*). Non-Professional: The British Fantasy Society. Life Achievement: Michael Moorcock, Marion Zimmer Bradley.

Thog's Litcrit Masterclass. "...some novels, such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, have animals as central characters..." (John Peck and Martin Coyle, *Literary Terms and Criticism*, 2nd ed, 1993)

More Awards. Jane Stableford is all excited by the *Children of the Night* award presented by the Dracula Society to husband Brian for his translation of Paul Féval's 1867 *Vampire City*: "It's a truly disgusting thing – a green hairy man (probably undead) with popping eyeballs and too many teeth, emerging from the grave with one clawed hand resting on a tombstone nicely decorated with human skulls. Well, Brian likes it, bless him." *Gaylactic Spectrum Awards* for gender-bending sf/fantasy went to *The Gumshoe*, *The Witch* and *The Virtual Corpse* by Keith Hartman and *The Wild Swans* by Peg Kerr (novel co-winners), "Dapple" by Eleanor Arnason (short) and *Being John Malkovich* ("other").

Lawsuit Corner. Uri Geller is allegedly suing Nintendo for "hundreds of millions of dollars" over the Pokemon monster "Yun Geller," who wields a spoon, "uses psychic mind-waves to give his victims bad headaches," and worst of all has not only lightning bolts on his chest which are obviously SS insignia, but a forehead star which can only be the Star of David! (Three lightnings; a five-pointed star.) "Nintendo turned me into an evil, occult Pokemon character... Nintendo stole my identity by using my name and my signature image of a bent spoon."

A Celebration of British SF is scheduled for 28 June to 1 July 2001 at Liverpool University, with guests Brian Aldiss, Stephen Baxter, John Clute, Nicola Griffith, Gwyneth Jones and Ken MacLeod. SAE for further details to the SF Foundation, 22 Addington Rd, Reading, RG1 5PT.

Small Press. The *Small Press Guide 2001* (6th ed) has 315 one-page magazine listings, heavily poetry-oriented but with occasional genre items like *Ansible*, *Interzone* and *The Third Alternative*. £9.99 post free from Writers' Bookshop, Remus House, Coltsfoot Dr, Woodston, Peterborough, PE2 9JX.

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of Flexibility:* "He encircled her hand with his arm..." (Marion Zimmer Bradley, *Endless Voyage*, 1975) "She pouted, her lower lip projecting like the bottom drawer in a chest of drawers which has jammed open on account of too many clothes being stuffed inside." (Mary Scott, *Murder On Wheels*, 2000) "A sudden silence richly filled the rarefied air that now seemed to encircle them. Aware of their growing attraction to one another, they both sat awkwardly for a moment unsure of how to proceed, much less conquer, the new and fertile ground of their budding relationship." (Sharon Sebastian, *Backside of Nowhere*, 2000)

A New BEGINNING

Tony Ballantyne

I had to apologize as soon as I got back to the flat. "I want to say I'm sorry," I said, taking off my coat. Julia looked up from her book with a drained expression and shook her head. "Not now, James. I'm too tired."

We had argued too often recently: both of us were experienced at the tactic of offering a token retreat in the expectation of a similar concession from the other side. That was when she realized. A smile spread across her face and she jumped to her feet.

"You've got it, haven't you? You've caught Blue Glass."

She put her arms around me and squeezed, and my body crackled and shivered. It felt nice, but the sensation quickly became too intense and I gasped. She let go of me, her face full of concern.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot how sensitive you are at first. Come here and sit down."

She took my hand in a warm and crackling grip and led me to the stained old sofa. She drained the lemonade from her glass and held it before me. In my altered vision it seemed to shine from within with a deep violet light. The moistness in Julia's beautiful brown eyes emitted the same glow.

"Now, just use your forefinger. Rub it gently down the side of the glass."

She licked her lips and I saw the same beautiful blue there in her mouth. I leant forward to kiss her, but she shook her head. "No. Try the glass first. Take your time."

I reached out with one finger and touched the glass. The potential for a note lay within. Flick it, and you would hear it. As I touched the glass that hidden note filled my body. I dragged my finger down the glass and my whole body vibrated in sympathy.

"Nice, isn't it?" said Julia

"Mmmm," I replied.

"Stroke the glass for the moment. Then we'll hold a piece of wood. It has such a warm living feeling."

We sat in silence together for some time, me stroking

the glass, Julia watching me and smiling. It was as if the arguments of the last few weeks had never taken place.

"Where did you catch it?" she asked.

I gave a little shiver as the memory pushed its way through the shimmering crackle of sensation. A picture of a tall matchstick figure covered in pale white bristles leaning over me. A blank mask of a face with two dark hemispherical infrared sensing pits where the eyes should be. I stopped rubbing the glass for a moment.

"The alien infected me. I was waiting at the traffic lights by the town hall and it came running towards me. It was dodging through the cars and lorries; they were missing it with nothing to spare. I was frozen with... awe, I suppose. It stood in the road, just beyond the kerb, staring at me. You could see the shock on the drivers' faces as they swerved around it."

Julia nodded wisely. "The town hall marks the edge of its territory. It wouldn't cross onto the Downey Road alien's turf."

I nodded impatiently. This was my story.

"Yes, I know. Anyway, it stared at me for about ten seconds, and then it just flicked its head around the other way like a bird, and focused on something up the street. Then it was off, running back into the traffic. I didn't realise it had infected me until I was halfway home."

I shivered at the memory. The word "alien" has become a cliché. The label lets us avoid having to appreciate just how literally otherworldly the creatures are. Julia didn't say anything, and I didn't recognize at the time that her silence implied a deeper understanding of the situation. I began to rub the glass again, this time cupping it in both hands. The feeling was electric. I watched as wobbling cylinders of blue light rose shivering up to the ceiling and spoke in a relaxed murmur.

"This is wonderful. All this time and I never understood what you were talking about. I shouldn't have shouted at you for getting yourself infected. I should have

tried to understand when you gave up your job. We could have taken the time to share this together."

She gave a little smile. "There are plenty of diseases left to catch. Barnaby says there are over one hundred and fifty. I'm sure we can share some of them."

She ran her hand through my hair and I felt it crackle as if it was filled with electricity. Warm shocks ran in delicious shivers through my body.

"That feels so good. What is causing it?"

She began to knead my head gently and started to recite a lesson that Barnaby had taught her.

"The agent that causes Blue Glass is carried in water. The aliens exude infected moisture that is caught in the layer of bristles that covers their body, ready to be brushed against someone. When you are infected the agent makes its way to your nervous system to incubate. The altered sensations you feel are the agents restructuring your nervous system so that they can reproduce. When reproduction starts the sensations will pass, but your body will be capable of receiving more of the alien diseases. Blue Glass is paving the way."

"Oh," I sighed with pleasure. "How long will this last?"

"Two to three days. Enjoy it while you can."

When I think back to the rows we had had when Julia had first started to collect alien diseases, at the way I had called her intelligence and common sense into question, I was always a little surprised how calmly she accepted my apologies. The first few days after I caught Blue Glass were almost as it had been at the start of our relationship. Almost. There was always that little pool of silence between us. That thing we would not talk about.

Straight after Blue Glass I caught Sunshine in My Bones. Sunshine in My Bones. It's an odd name to those who've never had it. Do you know what it's like to have a bad cold, and to lie wrapped up warm in bed? That feeling of contentment as someone brings you hot drinks and you don't have to worry about work or responsibility or anything but just snuggling up and getting better? That's what Sunshine in My Bones is like, and without any of the bad parts like the blocked ears or headaches or runny nose.

I remember smiling up at Julia from the sofa as she brought me another cup of hot lemon tea.

"Why is the alien doing this to us?" I said.

She brushed a magazine onto the floor and perched on the edge of the sofa and gave me a smile.

"I don't know. Barnaby says that the alien is altering our bodies. Each disease improves us a little bit. First your nervous system, now your bone marrow is being rejuvenated. Each disease makes us a little bit better."

I frowned and sipped the tea. It tasted so good I felt bad about disagreeing with her.

"Oh. It's odd. I get the impression the aliens don't care about humans one way or another. Look at our alien. Sometimes it's creeping down the high street on all fours, feeling the paving stones, other times you see it perching on the roof of the King's Arms, staring at the stars. I keep seeing it climbing in and out of the manholes. It runs around the bounds of its territory, or down the middle of the high street, dodging people as if they weren't there,

but it never seems to take an interest in us. When it infected me it was as if it was looking right through me."

Julia leant back on the chair and stretched luxuriously. She was growing her hair out. Peroxide strands bunched up on the sofa cushions, their glossy brown roots making a cushion for her head. She gave me a patronizing smile.

"You're trying to read your own body-language conventions into an alien being. The Betas have been travelling through the galaxy for millennia. Barnaby says they share a common pool of race memory that they use to communicate with each other. Does body language mean anything to a telepath? Do you really think we can hope to relate all our experiences to such an advanced race?"

I felt a little hurt. My reply was petulant.

"They don't seem that advanced. They seem more like a flock of birds that have descended upon our planet. Like a bunch of robins, each defending their own territory. They never seem to communicate with us humans."

"Mmm. Maybe not yet," replied Julia enigmatically. She suddenly yawned and stretched and then stood up.

"I've heard that Selina has caught something called String Symphony. It sounds interesting. I thought I might call round her flat and see what it's like. Do you want to come?"

I shook my head. I was quite happy with Sunshine in My Bones for the moment.

"Suit yourself," she said, walking from the room. "I'll see you later."

"Bye," I said, but it wasn't the same after she had gone. I fell asleep trying to imagine my body being converted by diseases, transforming me into some wondrous new being. Instead I had nightmares. An alien stared at me with its unseeing dark pits of eyes. It sighed with pleasure as my will was slowly stripped away by wave after wave of disease until I was left completely under its control.

When I awoke the Sunshine was fading from my bones.

Julia caught String Symphony off Selina and walked around for a week with a smile on her face, the music of the spheres ringing in her ears. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get that disease to take hold. Me, I caught Scabs instead. My skin swelled up in large red weeping pustules that quickly hardened over to form brown scabs the size, shape and colour of pennies.

"This is awful," I moaned, sweeping dead scabs from the bed one morning.

"You're telling me," said Julia with distaste. "Can't you sleep on the sofa?"

I stared at her in surprise. "You could show a little more sympathy."

"Like you did to me when I had Scabs?"

I dropped my eyes. "Sorry. I didn't realize what it was like back then. I thought it was your own fault."

She came close and brushed her lips across my cheek.

"I know. Most uninfected people still think that way. Poor baby."

I sat on the edge of the sagging bed and wriggled my toes in the reddish pile of the old carpet. I rested my handful of rusty brown scabs on my knee and looked around the tired yellow wood-chipped walls of the room.

The novelty of sharing a flat together had worn off. Now I stared at the grey woolly strand of cobweb that trailed from the ceiling to the shapeless brown wardrobe and wished I could go out for the day. Anything to get away from the warm claustrophobia of our dimly-lit rooms and the endless cups of milky tea I needed to drink to feed my pus-filled scabs.

"I hate this," I said, sighing. "I can feel myself draining away. Every scab that drops off is like another part of me gone for good. Do you think that's what the alien is doing? Harvesting us bit by bit? Salvaging our genetic material from the biological detritus our bodies slough away? If we keep this up long enough there will be none of me left. The alien could be rebuilding me as its slave on its spaceship."

"The alien doesn't have a spaceship. Everyone knows that."

"Well, you know what I mean. Think about it. Every disease we catch alters us in some way. Why come all this way just to infect us with them? There's got to be a reason for it. What are they turning us into?"

Julia picked up her hairbrush and knelt down in front of the half-length mirror that lay propped against the wall by the door. She began to brush her hair slowly, pulling out the strands so she could see the natural colour shining in the light. I thought about how I preferred her hair short and blonde, but I said nothing. She continued to brush in silence. I began to speak again.

"I mean, look at me. Over the last few weeks I've had my nervous system changed, my bone marrow altered and now I'm shedding my skin. I heard that the change was genetic, it's being wired into our DNA. Our children will be born already transformed. It's not as though they'll have a natural resistance to Blue Glass, it's just that they will already be altered by it so that it won't be able to affect them. I mean, you can't tell me that doesn't worry you. How do we know the aliens are acting in our interest?"

Julia pulled the brush angrily through her hair and then dropped it on the floor. She spun to face me.

"You really annoy me sometimes, James. You don't listen to a word I say, you disagree with everything you read, and yet you're willing to believe anything you're told by some bloke down the pub. The aliens cannot and will not harm humans. This is an accepted fact. It was established at contact. No one, absolutely no one, disagrees with that. No one but you."

I shook my head slowly. Actually, I didn't believe any differently, either. No one who felt the wave of belief that washed across the world that night when the aliens finally struggled free of that gigantic mud heap they had been growing on Wanstead Flats could ever feel otherwise. *Hello, it had said. We heard your minds calling across space. We will not harm you.* It was so obvious it was almost without question.

Those who may think us credulous and foolish for believing, I say this: firstly, unless you were there you cannot understand, and secondly, events have since proved us right. The Aliens never intended to harm us.

Julia's face softened. "I'm sorry for being so snappy," she said. "It's not your fault. I remember what it was like

having Scabs. You feel negative about everything. Don't worry. You'll get over it."

She straightened up and ran her fingers through her hair, looked at herself in approval and then reached for her new brown woollen coat, hanging on the back of the door.

"I'm going out for a while," she said. "I need some fresh air. Do you want anything?"

I looked down at the carpet and sighed. "Stay with me," I said. "I'm bored."

"I'll only be an hour or so," she said. "Are you sure you don't want anything?"

I looked down at the cluster of scabs in my hand and sighed again. "Nothing really. What should I do with these?"

She followed my gaze and began to giggle.

"You should collect them up and keep them nice and safe in a jar. Stop the alien stealing them."

I smiled and shook my head in pretend despair.

"You're sick." I scraped the remaining few scabs from the bed into my hand and carried them into the bathroom where I threw them into the toilet.

We both caught Forget-Me-Not from a couple in a pub that stood near the town hall. They had caught Blue Glass almost as soon as the alien had staked out its territory around South Street and were old hands at the disease game by now. They were very dismissive of Julia's attempts to impress them with her recent bout of String Symphony, but they laughed when I told them of my jar full of Scabs. As the evening wore on and we got drunker together they agreed to infect us. Forget-Me-Not is a nodal disease, like Blue Glass. You need to catch it to open up the possibility of catching others. Round about closing time the male half of the couple leant across and kissed me full on the lips, then began to giggle. I smiled and forced a laugh, not realizing what the joke was. I never knew until later that the vector for Forget-Me-Not was a state of mind, not physical contact. Getting drunk helps the disease to jump across to that bit at the base of the brain already subtly changed by Blue Glass.

Julia and I staggered home, arm in arm.

"I'm drunk," she giggled. "I can't remember where we live."

"This way," I said, pointing down an alley. A metal fence, half way down its length, blocked it. Beyond lay the dark emptiness of a wasteground. We both started to laugh.

"Forget-Me-Not is reprogramming our brains," said Julia. "It's shifting our memories around, storing them in other places."

I stood swaying, trying to remember. All I could think of was Christmas cake. Sticking a skewer into it to make holes then pouring whisky over it from the cap of the bottle. The taste of the rich, alcohol-soaked sultanas filled my mouth. The sensation suddenly vanished and I had a flash of memory.

"We've come the wrong way. Back down the road."

Forget-Me-Not is the best disease. You might not think so, but when you've been there...

Julia and I sat up in bed playing remember games.

"I remember the first time I saw snow," she said. "My Daddy held me in his arms and I looked up into the dark sky and these big white flakes came drifting down towards me. I was screaming with delight. And then a flake fell on my tongue and I just giggled and giggled."

I held her hand and tried to remember her name. It came back to me in a sudden rush along with a burst of real affection. It was like that rush from the first three weeks when we first started seeing each other. Something else went from my mind.

"I've forgotten what the Beatles sounded like," I said.

"Whoah! Good one," said Julia, impressed. The memories would come flooding back, you see, and it would be like hearing each song again for the first time, only this time you had everything else wrapped around them, all the deeper understanding you later picked up that let you really appreciate what you had got.

After all is said and done about what the aliens did to us, Forget-Me-Not was still a wonderful thing.

Julia began to smile. She squeezed my hand tight and curled up her toes to make bunches of the cheap patterned bed sheet.

"I'm going to sneak out later on and see Barnaby. We're sleeping together, you know."

She giggled.

"Oh no, I forgot. I'm not supposed to say that, am I?"

I ran my hand through her lengthening brown hair and played with the blonde streaks at the end. I was giggling too.

"Don't worry. My brain is telling me it knew already." I laughed louder. "Ooops! I've forgotten it now!"

But it would come back later and then it would really hurt.

"Forgotten what?" said Julia, and we both laughed louder.

The moment passed, we sighed and then lay back in silence. Julia rolled onto her front, rested her head on my chest and began to stroke my arm.

"This is it then," she said. "Final understanding. They say that Forget-Me-Not is the end of the beginning. We shall achieve a state of grace that leads us to appreciate the remaining diseases we shall catch. Our bodies are prepared."

"Mmmm," I said. I gazed at the big fragile ball of the paper lampshade.

"All those years, all that distance. Soon we will be able to tap into the aliens' pool of race memories. What must it be like, to look across space and see other creatures' minds, shining in the darkness like the stars?"

"Enlightenment," I said.

"I think so," said Julia, dreamily. She tensed suddenly.

"Hold on. It's coming. Can you feel it?"

I could. A huge dark pit opening up somewhere, and we were falling towards it in our minds. There was a light at the centre. Julia gripped my arm, and I folded myself around her. The light expanded and washed over us.

Julia left me the following week and moved in with Barnaby. They've got a nice flat in the seedy area just behind the town hall. It looks a lot more rundown than it is, due

to the local kids graffitioing up the walls, but Julia swears she feels safe if she has to go out at night. Funnily enough, it's just around the corner from the wasteground that we ended up at that night we forgot the way home. Julia has some theory that we can read our own thoughts forward in time as well as back and she was heading to her future house. I say it was just coincidence. We argue about it when we meet to swap diseases. There is a sizeable minority of the enlightened who think that she has a point, but by and large most of us think it is just fantasy. It's rare that you meet an enlightened one who doesn't have both feet planted firmly on the ground. We're a sensible bunch. Well, you have to be, don't you? You build up all these fantasies about your place in the universe, about how someone is watching over you and then the aliens appear and it's as though you can just give up. Here they are to help you transcend your body and make the conversion to a higher plain of existence, but of course it's not like that, is it?

A bunch of farmers: that's what they are. Actually, they're not so much farmers as herders. Slowly traversing the universe through the millennia, looking for planets where life has evolved that will support their livestock: the 150 or so diseases that make up their herd. They rear them inside the bodies that are their new pastures, and reap their bizarre harvest by collecting the dead bacteria that we excrete. Julia and I saw all that in one huge loop through their accumulated race memories, just after the Forget-Me-Not put us in contact with the shared part of their consciousness. Swooping back through time, world upon world, to some insignificant planet far away where they first evolved. Bouncing forward again, following them as they moved on to new worlds when a planet's inhabitants and their future offspring had grown immune. When the metaphorical soil can be farmed no more.

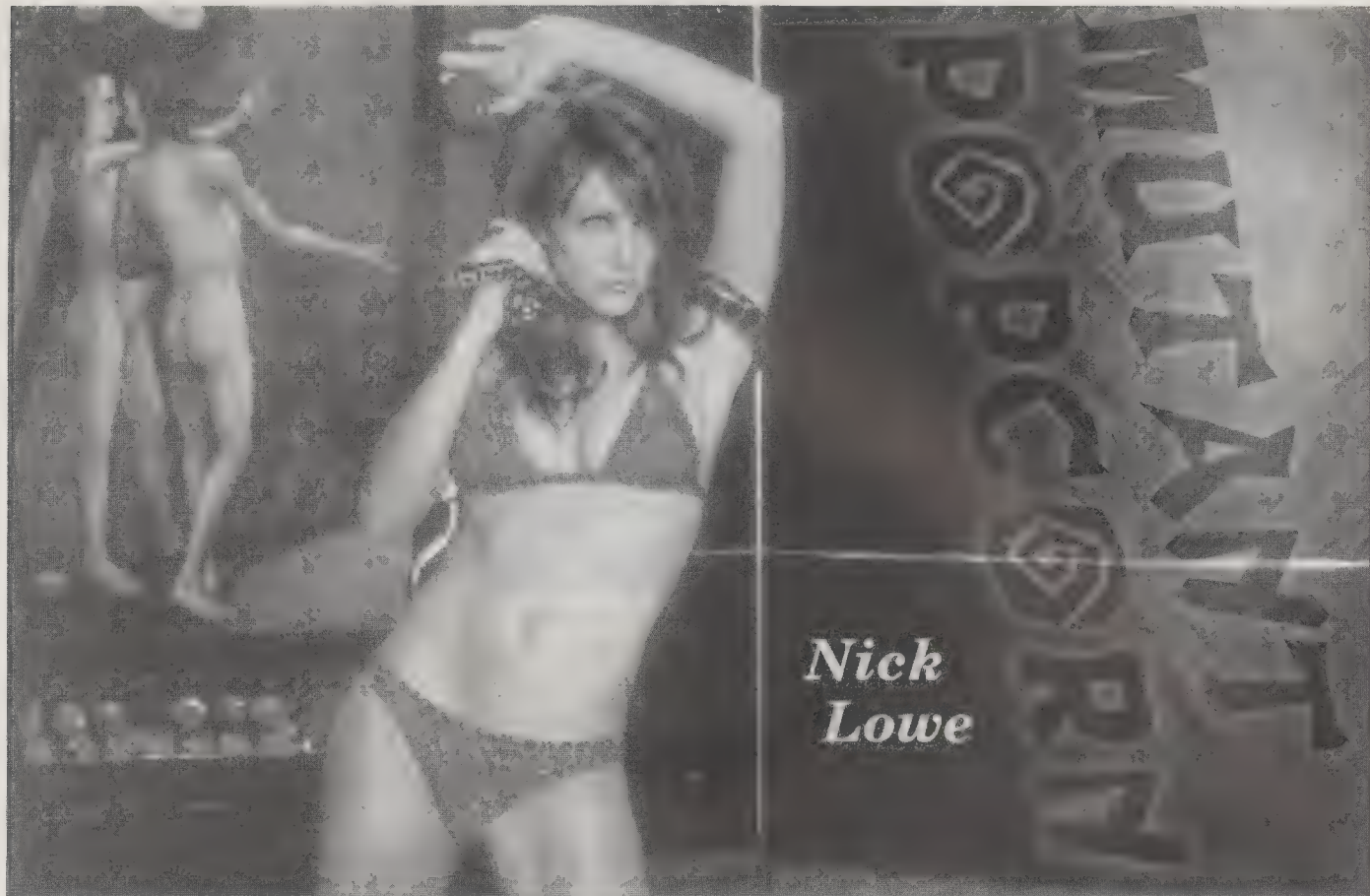
It's a sobering thought, and one that forces you to face up to the facts. They weren't interested in us at all. We knew it in our heart of hearts, you only had to see the way they looked at us.

Seeing the truth like that forces you to come to grips with the real world.

So what have I done? Well, I've cleaned up the flat. That long cobweb had to go. I've thrown out the old clothes that have been cluttering up the wardrobe and sold the guitar I never learned to play. I've even cleaned out the fridge. I've dusted off the word processor and started writing articles for magazines and newspapers again. This article has been my first attempt, shaking the dust off, as it were. I feel as if I'm back in control of my own life rather than just waiting for things to happen. I guess we all put our lives on hold when the aliens arrived.

Oh, and I've got a bit of a sore throat, as if I'm coming down with something. I hope it's just a cold.

Tony Ballantyne appeared here last month with the story "Single-Minded" – which followed "The Sixth VNM" (IZ 138), "Gorillagram" (IZ 139) and others. He lives in Oldham, Lancashire, and is currently working on a science-fiction novel.



Nick Lowe

In the 1970s, there used to be what I assume was an urban myth that film bookers for the early multiscreens ran a game called *10 Meatballs Escape from Alcatraz*, where they competed to see who could put together the best composite hoarding. Perhaps the myth seeded its own reality, because until recently my local ABC had a suspiciously neat line in billings like (I'm not making this up) *Sweet and Lowdown* *X-Men* *Snatch* *My Dog Skip*. Had, alas, because this week it closed after 87 years to make way for a Marks & Spencers. But with a final cheery two-fingered flourish, the choice of final week's feature before the lights went out forever was *Pitch Black*.

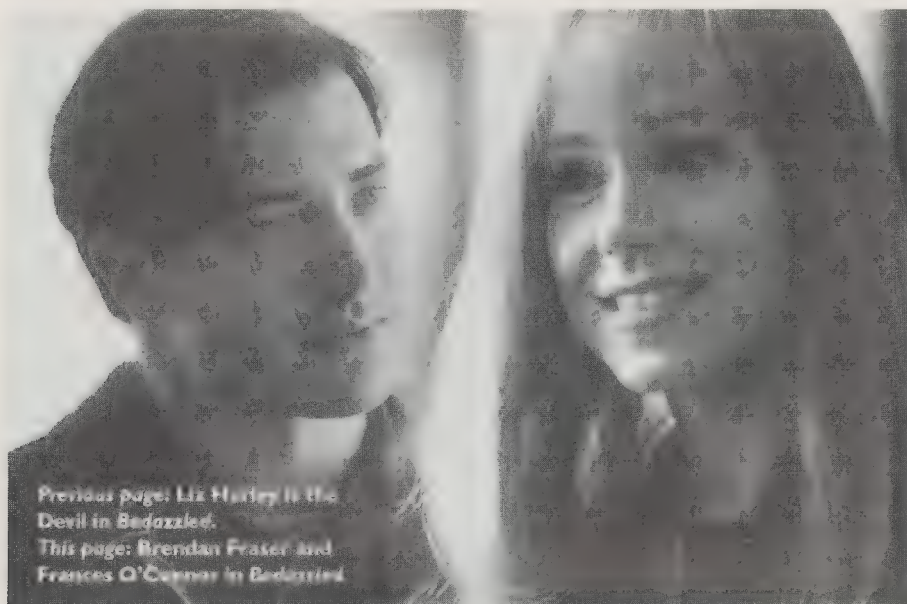
They nearly missed their chance, because with a cheek you can't help but admire *Pitch Black* originally wanted to call itself *Nightfall*, and was only thwarted by the emergence from the actual rights owners of what then became *Isaac Asimov's Nightfall* (which sank into swift eclipse on its own US release earlier this year). It's rather a shame, because the whole conceit of David Twohy's film is precisely that it's "Nightfall" transported to a raw, primitive world (Queensland) where Asimovian luxuries like humanistic social content and talk-based plotting are unaffordable exotics, and only the most primal Austro-Alien plots can survive in the

trackless desert wastes. Twohy knows perfectly well what he's doing; he's a genre-savvy writer (he scripted *Warlock* and *Waterworld*, alongside non-genre things like *The Fugitive* and erm *GI Jane*) whose sporadic directorial credits include a rather good TV movie of C. L. Moore's "Vintage Season," retitled *Timescape* with the same infallible predator's eye for someone else entirely's snappy title.

So *Pitch Black* it is, and surprise-hit status could hardly have come to a jollier piece of no-frills tosh. Like all good Australian sf movies, it features desert, goggles, convict heroes, Lewis Fitz-Gerald, and a refreshing indifference to aspirational Hollywood values that almost succeeds in lifting it above the mediocrity it seeks. It's perhaps a mite less fun than we've a right to expect from a film about a motley cast of expendables spacewrecked on a desert world and stalked by an escaped serial killer among the remains of a settler colony mysteriously wiped out by a nameless dark-haunting menace from beneath the earth. But it's hard to fault the narrative engineering. For a while you do wonder how on earth a film this brawny-headed is going to handle the necessary exposition of five-body orbital dynamics; but luckily the settlers turn out to have left an unusual clue in the form of cinema's first plot orrery, and in no time at all our heroes are hauling the power cells through the

Night Land to the escape shuttle while affordably blurry CG predators pick off the bickering eightsome, no, seven, whoops, six, look BEHIND YOU... Primal sf cinema at its most derivative, opportunistic and unedifying, it comes perilously close to making an illuminating statement about genre priorities. Not brilliant, but certainly bright.

At the other end of the visible spectrum, the gloom-inducing *Bedazzled* is the latest instalment in Harold Ramis' increasingly-desperate attempt to replicate the phenomenon of *Groundhog Day*: yet another fable about an underfulfilled professional male getting a much-needed inner makeover by being put through a gag-machine fantasy in which he gets to do his life in as many takes as it needs to get it right. As in *Groundhog Day* and *Multiplicity*, the dream-experiment centres on the opportunity for unlimited failure without the responsibility and consequences normally attendant on blowing your entire life. Evidently what attracted Ramis to the material was not the (much-missed) leaping Beryllians; and indeed the whole transit from sixties to noughties, from England to LA, and from Pete & Dud to a script for Ramis from the now-seventysomething Larry Gelbart forces a notably different spin on the material. Most notably and disastrously, the lead has to be attractive; it's easy to



Previous page: Liz Hurley in the Devil in Bedazzled.

This page: Brendan Fraser and Frances O'Connor in Bedazzled.

believe in Dudley Moore as a hopeless nerk, but another thing when the character is played by Brendan Fraser. By contrast, the object of his yearning (Frances O'Connor) is a literal girl-next-door, far more accessible than Raquel Welch, particularly if you're a pinup like Brendan. All he has to do to win her is to stop the hilarious character acting and be his adorable self, and the sooner the better so everyone can get home.

It might still have worked with some better gags; but the test of a *Bedazzled* is how many of the seven wishes you can remember unprompted, and some of the 2000 crop are so one-joke-or-fewer that you'll have trouble totting them up well before the ad hoc release-clause and Little-Book life lesson roll their inexorable way around. ("I don't think it really matters how far you go in life, it's how you get there that matters...") The punch-code-to-exit-sketch plot device is a particularly unfortunate hostage, since the audience knows that every wish can be aborted the moment it stops being fun, and is thus willing Brendan to whip out the pager well before the end of each. Symptomatically, the one quite good joke ("Homework: $x^n + y^n = z^n$. Solve for $n > 2$ ") is a throwaway noticeable only by those sufficiently bored to be watching the background rather than E. Hurley in fantasy maths mistress outfit. The real lesson is that if you want to play games with your audience's attention span you have to be prepared to lose.

Regression to 1968 is also the instrument of life-cleansing in *Disney's The Kid*, which has fair claim to have achieved the most toothpulling concept in modern cinema (Bruce Willis stalked by his inner child), and to say that it's not as bad as it sounds is faint praise when frankly not many

things could be. There are, to be sure, some ridiculously good things lavished on this movie: the Lily Tomlin character, much of the image-consultancy and flirtation dialogue. But someone has got the idea from *The Sixth Sense* that Bruce can perform with children, when it would be nearer the mark to say Haley Joel Osment is so good that he can even perform with Bruce Willis. For wee Spencer Breslin, sadly, is no HJ; and no amount of charitable insistence from Emily Mortimer that "he's adorable" will override the evidence of our eyes.

The unusual product-labelling title is probably less an informative tag to deter confusion with the Chaplin ("Hey, I wanted to rent a 1921 silent about a homeless bum who picks up street kids!") than a frantic hand-wave to pull in a bigenerational audience. But it would be an uncomfortable film to watch with an eight-year-old. ("When do I get my first hickey?" "17." "When do I find out what a hickey is?" Child at screening, very audibly: "Mum, what's a hickey?") The home-world of eight-year-old Bruce is very thinly fleshed out, and it doesn't help that he's a refugee from a decade that means nothing to those who weren't there to remember it. Instead, the film addresses itself almost entirely to middle-aged males at the suggestible age when reason most easily surrenders to the honeyed lure of downshifting. Why not, indeed, toss away everything you've achieved in your life: a Master's from UCLA; a lavishly-paid, complex, challenging, wholly satisfying career you perform brilliantly, commanding the respect of clients and peers; the financial security to settle down and start a family on a responsible footing? Imagine: you could jack all this in for a precarious, environmentally-suspect blue-collar living that really does prove you've learned nothing since the

age of eight. Irresistible or what?

The one clever touch is making Willis' character an image consultant, a quick-fixer of people's relationships with the world around them by massaging the outer rather than the inner person. Clearly this is a no-no; as *The Kid* sums it up, "You help people lie about who they really are so they can pretend to be someone else," and what they should presumably be doing instead is taking the advice of their plot therapist and sorting themselves out from the inside. Yet the whole film is an image-consultancy job on reality, buying absolutely the quick-fix model of life, according to which all human misery is the result of specific childhood traumas that can be confronted and overcome. *The Kid* does have a paradox on its hands here, though, in that the plot has somehow to enable Willis to heal his miserable childhood by altering the outcome of the playground fight that will turn him into a loser for the rest of his schooldays, without actually changing his subsequent history in any way whatever. It's hard to tell, or care, whether this departure from movie self-help doctrine is a deliberately grownup touch or just a hands-in-the-air gesture of surrender. Probably the latter, as *The Kid's* script bears marks, like so many Willis movies, of having been through the star-cooperation process.

The emphatic return appointment with the therapist is never mentioned again; the wedding scene is a shameless lift of a sequence in a Marc Brown picture book, as your accompanying minor will inform you with gleeful indignation; and no conceivable sense can be made of the climactic scene. Nor is it confined to script, actually. A fun game with A-list male star movies is to spot the strungouts, the shots where makeup has been unable to camouflage the tell-tale signs of star behaviour around the eyes. Needless to say, only a churl would draw specific attention to the car scene in *Kid* (the closeups visibly shot on a day when Bruce was in perkier shape), or the bit in *Bedazzled* where – but no, why cheat you of your hard-earned mean-spirited fun.

A far more thoughtful and affecting timetriping treatment of childhood and its loss is on view in a far less able film, Willard Carroll's creaking version of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, which has finally tumbled off the shelf after two years. Carroll's main distinction to date has been his work on the *Brave Little Toaster* features, and the kindest thing to say about this astonishing triumph of reach over grasp is that it does demonstrate how a strong enough story can just about remain standing after everything that amazingly bad film-making can throw at it.

In fairness, Carroll's film is clearly the work of someone with enormous appreciation and sensitivity for the things that make Philippa Pearce's 1958 novel one of the all-time touchstone works of juvenile fantasy. A rich, poignant reflection on landscape, change and memory, the book has its 1950s hero timeslip nightly to become the imaginary friend of a lonely Victorian orphan, watching her grow up and put childhood behind her in the space of what for the devastated Tom is only a few summer weeks, with an unforgettable climactic set piece (skating upriver to Ely in the great frost of 1895) capped by an affecting final reunion in Tom's own time with the old lady in whose memories he has been lodging. In the event, the film's main strength is its uncompromising fidelity to the book, preserving original dialogue wherever possible, and clinging on to little bits of plotting that make no sense at all (such as the manifestation of Tom's kid brother on Ely Cathedral). Even Carroll's own painfully inept frame narrative, with Nigel Le Vaillant as an adult Tom remembering the story in flashback, is a contrivance to reconcile the novel's very specific chronology (1958/1895) with the needful contemporary setting.

Sadly, though, in actual execution the film is a shambles. To say that TV chorister Anthony Way is not a natural actor is like saying that burbot are not natural hot-air balloonists. Seldom has a single performance destroyed a well-meant film so totally as young Way's amazing failure to master even the rudiments of film acting, like the reaction shot or the bolt upright in bed. After a while it develops its own grotesque fascination, like a particularly enthusiastic team of local no-hopers losing spectacularly on *It's a Knockout*. Something is clawed back by the succession of actresses playing the pivotal figure of Hattie, from Florence Fairytale Hoath to an eventual Joan Plowright; but the attempt to flesh out the other adult characters is largely disastrous, and the plot is just too unshapely to be rendered in a pacey, coherent film narrative. Even the locations, so vital to the story's sense of place and history, don't seem to connect in any comprehensible way – in part because the film was made in the Isle of Man, creating one or two continuity problems for a version determined to respect the book's very specific East Anglian setting, and raising the uneasy suspicion that the whole film is some kind of tax dodge. And yet, despite everything, the story's original power does shine through, and its very indifference to current cinematic values only enhances the dreamlike feeling of a film that's fallen out of time.

More competent, less edifying mid-Atlantic family fun in *The Little Vampire*, a wobbly attempt to make an international family movie out of one of Germany's best-known exports, Angela Sommer-Bodenburg's long-running series of juveniles about a boy's clandestine friendship with a family of vampires. Shot in the UK, with American leads, by a mostly Dutch crew under a German director who works mainly out of LA, it's a film whose self-consciousness about its Europudding origins seems to have leaked all over its interpretation of the original books. In Uli Edel's strange revamp, the action is translocated to, of all places, Scotland – a nation not particularly known for its vaultloads of centuries-old bloodguzzling undead (outside Glasgow City Chambers, obviously), and apparently a compromise with the impatience of US audiences with locations where the picturesque natives don't speak a version of English.

As it turns out, though, it's an unexpectedly productive relocation, in ways that don't seem to have penetrated the film-makers' own conscious awareness. On one hand, it allows the film to build itself around the great Scottish heritage-cinema master plot, in which American tourism entrepreneurs succumb to the elder magic of the landscape they've come to bulldoze, and exchange suit & tie for local knitwear in an affirmation of their surrender to the spell. *Little Vampire* is set in a familiar genre landscape of heathery moors, B&Bs in huge cliff-top castles, and a complete absence of conurbation, whither young Tony's parents have come to create wealth through the global bonding power of golf.

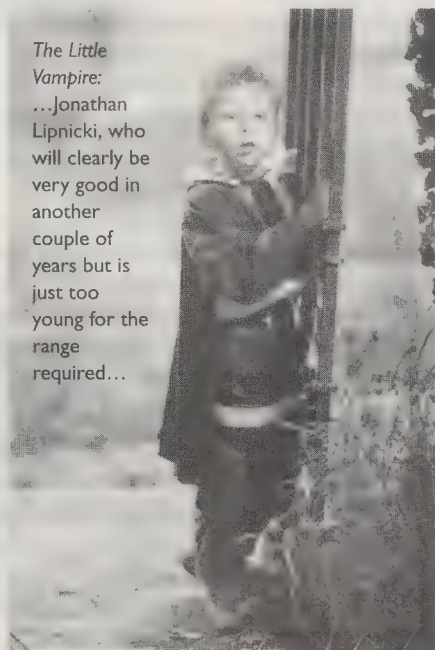
But it's a particularly apt setting for a film that rather strikingly sets out

to present vampires as a kind of misunderstood, historically persecuted blend of Romanians and fairies, because both the Scottish landscape and the feudal aristocracy that owns it are notoriously a product of precisely the kind of ruthless ethnic cleansing that the film presents the local ruling class as having perpetrated over four centuries on the indigenous population of vampires. In elaborating the books' picture of vampires as misunderstood and lovable – in the later books the now-teenage Tony has a romance with Rudolf's kid sister – *The Little Vampire* argues, not wholly hysterically, that the heritage business in which European film is itself so deeply complicit has been built on the bones of centuries of brutal expropriation. In contrast to many of its genre, it's not a film at all friendly to the Scots, who are portrayed as dour, corrupt, dimwitted and xenophobic, in marked contrast to the Americans and the (ethnically opaque, but English-named and -accented) undead. And the golf theme is a masterstroke: quite apart from being the first major motion picture to fasten on the obvious links between golf and nosferatism, it astutely fingers the national game as one of the defining loci of class warfare and scandal in contemporary Scottish kickback culture, where public parks and natural landscape get ploughed up to make playgrounds for a tiny urban middle-class male minority.

For the most part, though, *The Little Vampire* is content to play to its target audience. So long as you're not a fan of the books, it muddles passably along in its way, despite near-disabably inept plotting, flat-falling attempts at contemporary humour, and rather shaky performances from the juvenile leads (including *Stuart Little*'s Jonathan Lipnicki, who will clearly be very good in another couple of years but is just too young for the range required). The film's bizarre ending, which sees the whole vampire nation somehow beam aboard Shoemaker-Levy and subsequently manifest on earth as normal mortals, drives a stake through the books and their whole rationale, as well as nailing any prospect of a sequel. Yet despite some rather tiresome amplification of the parental roles living and undead, it's nowhere near as mushy as a Hollywood version would be, and it's hard to imagine a US production making quite as much of the central conceit of vampire-hunting as historically-sanctioned genocide. In the very attempt to lighten up things of the night, it stirs up darker things beneath that smarter movies discreetly prefer to keep buried.

Nick Lowe

The Little Vampire:
...Jonathan Lipnicki, who will clearly be very good in another couple of years but is just too young for the range required...



RETURN TO COCKAIGNE

Paul Di Filippo

The pretty, nervous-looking woman – thirtyish, dark hair in bangs, long cloth winter coat concealing her taste in clothes – entered the Kirby-Ditko Extended Care Residence hurriedly. She brushed past the bored attendant at the reception desk, rode the elevator to the third floor, turned left familiarly down the long, disinfectant-scented corridor, and hastened to a private room. Inside she carefully closed the door, then grabbed a handy chair and wedged it under the knob.

“Westbrook, Calla – sorry I’m late. Do you think jamming the door will give us enough time?”

On the hi-tech bed centrepiecing the room lay a comatose man, hooked to various supplemental machines and assorted drips. The sheets neatly drawn up to his neck failed to conceal the lines of his wasted form: limbs like rope-wrapped poles, chest a set of wax-paper bellows. Grapes under blanched rose petals, his closed eyes punctuated a sunken, expressionless face.

Two earlier visitors, a man and a woman both of an age with the newcomer, sat in ugly institutional chairs beside the patient’s bed. The finely suited man possessed the brutish handsomeness of a troll, ameliorated by an impish grin. Legs crossed, he jogged his raised leather-shod foot impatiently. The other woman – plain-faced, wearing a drab blouse and skirt, oversized prescription glasses buffering watery blue eyes – remained intensely focused on the unconscious man and seemed content to wait thus forever.

“Our old friend just underwent a bath and massage,” replied Westbrook, the male visitor. “Mealtime, of course, to use one of the patient’s own favourite phrases, is a non-issue. I doubt he’ll receive any more attention for the next several hours, at least. That should give us plenty

of time for us to get in and out. With luck, no suspicious or dutiful helper will even so much as jiggle that knob. But I appreciate your concern, Hazel.”

The seated woman, Calla, looked up grimly. “Plenty of time if nothing goes wrong.”

Hazel’s nervous expression deepened. “What could go wrong? Do either of you anticipate something going wrong?”

“You can look at Pike and still wonder what could go wrong? We never anticipated losing him this way.”

Westbrook intervened between the women. “Now, now, ladies. Pike’s condition owes nothing to the drug and everything to his own megalomania, overconfidence and greed. We three should experience no problems, especially considering we’re all two decades wiser than the last time we did this.”

Hazel expressed her dissent with this character analysis by a snort. “Speak for yourself. Some days I feel I know even less than I did at 15. I’m less certain about the meaning of it all, that’s for sure.”

Westbrook’s grin resembled a crag fissuring. “But can you really ever be sure about uncertainty?”

Calla stood up. “Enough talk. Let’s go rescue Pike.”

Westbrook also rose to his feet. “Rescue him from himself, you mean.”

“Yes. From himself, from the allure of the Land. And don’t forget the starostas.”

Hazel shivered. “I *hate* the starostas. Almost as much as the lumpkins do. But I suppose we’re committed now.”

With this last remark, Hazel shrugged out of her coat. Naked beneath except for shoes, she appeared at ease with her body on display before these two particular witnesses.

Westbrook bowed appreciatively. "You look as beautiful as you did in your teens, my dear. How I've missed seeing you thus."

"We're not kids any more, Westy, going skinny-dipping on a dare. We all have our own lives now. Our own families, our own jobs – our own lovers."

Westbrook replied, "Too bad, don't you think? Who knows what would have developed among us four, had the Tetrad retained access to the Land? But such idle speculation is fruitless. As always, Hazel, you cut directly to the chase." The burly man tossed his suitcoat aside and began loosening his tie.

Calla turned her back to unbutton her shirt. "Shouldn't Pike be naked too?"

"I doubt it's necessary. He's firmly in the Land already. I debated even wasting a dose on him, but in the end I felt such a measure couldn't hurt."

As her friends continued to undress, Hazel asked, "This is the real supraliminal stuff, isn't it? The same as 20 years ago?"

Westbrook pulled his pants down. "But of course. Iatros handed it to me himself."

"I still don't understand. Where did he come from after all these years? Why did he cut contact with us back then? How did he find you? Why now?"

Naked knobby spine toward to her companions, Calla peeled off her panties, then turned defiantly around. "You're asking all the same questions we never had the answers to in the first place! Where did Iatros ever come from? Why did he leave us high, dry and hurting? How did he ever find us? Why then?"

"Now, now, ladies. Are you forgetting the Compact of the Winetree Grove?"

Both women appeared humbled. Westbrook nodded approvingly at their contrition, then added, "All I can tell you is that our mysterious friend looked not a day older than when we last saw him. I have no reason to distrust his gift, and look forward to nothing beyond this one unexpected visit. He might show up again tomorrow – or in another 50 years. Who can say? Now, allow me."

Westbrook removed a thumb-sized squeeze-bottle containing a barely discernible amount of clear liquid from the pocket of his chair-draped coat. He uncapped it to reveal a pinhole outlet. "A different delivery system this time, you'll notice. Please, take your seats and put Pike in the circuit."

The women took up stations on either side of the comatose man and each gripped a withered hand beneath the sheets. Westbrook moved to Pike's nutrient line, where he added a drop from his bottle directly into a feed-valve. Quickly then he hastened to each woman and decanted a drop apiece upon their tongues. He established himself in a chair at the foot of the bed, squirted the final drop into his own mouth, then grabbed the free hands of the two women.

"Cockaigne, our Dreamland – at last we return!"

The weird adult had been hanging at the fringes of the high-school grounds for the past several days. Mornings and afternoons, as the students flowed in and out of the

school, he maintained his innocuous yet disturbing stake-out. Sitting in his luxury sedan on a public street under the shade of a sycamore, reading some kind of strange magazine printed in a foreign language, sipping occasionally from a cardboard cup of coffee, the guy made no illicit or innocent overtures to anyone, male or female. But although the magazine seemed to claim his whole attention, his eyes shifted subtly from time to time over the adolescents.

The principal and the school custodian had gone to talk to the man on the third day, but whatever explanation or identification the guy had offered must have satisfied the authorities in charge of student safety, since no higher security procedures were invoked, and the stranger was allowed to maintain his lazy vigil.

Pike was the first member of the inalienable foursome to suggest speaking to the stranger.

Megawatts of energy barely containable in the thin copper wire of his 15-year-old body, the glimmer-eyed Pike often led his three friends down backroads of adventure they might not have otherwise ventured on. Calla, Westbrook and Hazel both appreciated and feared their nominal leader's wild bravado.

They sat now on the deserted bleachers at the edge of the football field behind the school, the last class of the day half an hour behind them.

"Turn that noise down a minute, Westy," Pike ordered. "I want to suggest a little game."

The rough-featured boy bent to the huge Panasonic boombox at his feet and cut the volume, reducing Blondie's "Call Me" to a background drone.

"I don't know why you don't get yourself one of these," said Pike, displaying a Sony Walkman big as an abridged paperback dictionary.

"I like to share my music. Your gizmo makes it too private."

"I'm into being private, okay?"

"Sure. And I'm into sharing."

Pushing her clunky glasses further up her small nose, Calla leaned over to inspect the Walkman. "It's got two headphone jacks, doesn't it, Pike? You could still share your music." Without asking, she popped the tape out. "Devo. I like them."

Hazel rocked backward and laughed. "I can just picture the two of you walking side by side leashed to the same little box. What happens if you spontaneously go around opposite sides of a telephone pole?"

"Kerchung!" Westbrook mimed a jerky fall.

"That's a non-issue. I've only got one set of headphones."

Calla sat back disappointedly.

"But I didn't want to talk about this kind of theoretical crap when I asked Westy to turn his box down. I wanted to propose a little adventure. Let's have some fun with Chester the Molester."

Westbrook objected. "The magazine guy out front in his car? I don't know... He's really creepy."

"What did you have in mind?" Hazel asked.

"Let's try to get him to do something really evil. Then we can turn him in to the cops and be big shots."

"Why hassle the lousy pervert?" Calla said. "He's just

pitiful. You're only lowering yourself to his level."

"I'm bored. And who says I'm living on some level higher than this guy to start with?"

"I'd like to think –" began Calla, but she was interrupted by Pike's abrupt leap to his feet.

"I'm doing it now! Whether you guys are with me or not."

Pike gained a lead of a few yards before the others caught up with him. Rounding the building, they saw the stranger apparently slumbering patiently in his car. His seat semi-reclined, he lay back with his glossy magazine covering his face. All the school buses had long departed, and no other kids lingered.

Slowly they approached the car. A yard away, the stranger's voice – accented, dark and bitter as Aztec chocolate mixed with heart's blood – halted them dead.

"Children of Cockaigne, I have been waiting for you."

They arrived in immortal Cockaigne as always, transitionlessly, startlingly, opening their eyes first and eternally upon Piebush Meadow, near the edge of the Winetree Grove.

Three gods regarded each other joyously, with clear-eyed intimacy. Caparisoned in elaborate greaves, gorgets, and gauntlets, caped and cowled, plumed and prinked, laced and leathered, booted and buckled, the trio – two junoesque women and a herculean man – stood tall as the lower limbs of the remote winetrees, those branches themselves a good ten feet above the licorice-moss carpeting the Meadow.

"Aniatis."

"Dormender."

"Yodsess."

So they named themselves, and broke into roiling laughter at the splendid sound of their own immense plangent voices.

"How marvellous to be home again!" said the man. "I feel as if shackles have been struck from my wrists and ankles!"

"Dormender, you name the sensation exactly!" The woman who had addressed Dormender whipped off her winged casque and released banners of thick red hair. "The eagle of my spirit soars high once again!"

The second woman smiled also, but fatalistically, and did not remove her own shining headgear, keeping all of her corvine tresses captured, save for a stray curl or two. "Yodsess, I too experience delight at the return of the swelling passion and supernal vitality that form our birthright. But I would advise you to re-don your armour. Have you forgotten the starostas? Likewise, what of our mission to rescue our lost comrade, Theriagin? There is no telling what foul manifestations in the Land may have arisen from his perverse and overlong tenancy of Castel Djurga."

Yodsess replaced her helm upon her noble brow, but could not resist twirling around. "Aniatis, as of old, your counsel is wise but oversober. Let all evil crawlers crawl, all ghastly ghaunts gibber, all starostas shamble! Our function is to exult! Look at the firmament that your earthly eyes have not beheld for much too long! Marbled with sherbert clouds! Smell the odours of the pepper shrubs and squab roots! Let the warm winds arriving

from their long journey across the Berryjuice Sea caress your cheek!"

Dormender grinned, as much at Yodsess's paeon as at Aniatis's obvious attempt to leash her own natural exuberance. "One an inebriate, one a clerk, and only I providing the voice of moderation. Ah, well, the middle path is a fine road for Dormender to travel. Come, ladies, let us leave Piebush Meadow behind, in quest of Castel Djurga."

So urging, Dormender adjusted the long sword yclept Salvor that was slung across his back and strode off. The women followed, and before they reached the marge of the Grove they had all availed themselves of sustenance from the bushes that gave the Meadow its name. Once under the trees, meaty gravy runnelling their chins, they snapped gourds full of heady beverage from the lowest branches and drowned their lunches in tart wine.

"Remember you the Pact made here?" Dormender asked jokingly.

Aniatis and Yodsess blushed at the thought of their old conflicts, and in what pleasant manner they had been resolved. Then the latter answered, "I remember."

"Yes, I too," said Aniatis. "I remember everything."

Pike could not restrain his elation at the self-incriminating words spoken by the foreign creep. All pretence of unnecessary entrapping innocence evaporated. "You heard him guys, he offered us coke! Man, your ass is grass now, weirdo! C'mon, let's go call the cops!"

Much to their surprise, the burly man seemed unruffled by the gleeful threats of the children's leader. He removed the magazine from his face, revealing in profile an olive complexion, chubby cheeks, a splayed blemish-pitted nose and a goatee. Far from frightening, he resembled most closely an opera impresario in a Bugs Bunny cartoon. Out of sight, his hand manoeuvred the seat control to power himself upright. He turned to face the four teenagers fully, captivating them with dark eyes.

"Have you never felt the wrongness of your lives? Do you not all experience the odd sense of being exiled? Isn't this world somehow deeply unsatisfying, a pale parody of what might truly exist? Yes, people turn to sense-numbing drugs to escape just such a sense of haunting emptiness. But you misperceived my speech. I named not the crippling white powder cocaine, but the peerless realm of Cockaigne."

Pike hesitated a moment in the face of the man's assurance and subject-changing tactics, but recovered enough bravado to insist, "You can't get out of this with a lot of fancy doubletalk, mister. You're nothing but a lousy drug-pusher, and you're going down."

"True, I do intend to offer you a drug. But it's a drug not of this world. Liberating, enlightening, transporting –"

"That's what all the pushers say! I've heard everything I need to hear now." Pike whirled toward his friends. "Guys, let's –"

His companions obviously failed to share his certainty. Silent till now, they exchanged timid glances among themselves before Westbrook spoke.

"Pike, admit it – we've all felt exactly the feelings he's describing. None of us truly belongs here. And that name,

Cockaigne – it means something to me.”

Hazel gripped Pike by the wrist, nailed him with her ardent gaze. “I can almost picture the place he’s talking about.”

“Me too,” said Calla.

Pike shook his head in confusion. “This is too weird. He’s hypnotized you three and now you’re all trying to hypnotize me. Somehow you’re putting pictures in my brain –”

“No,” said the stranger, “those are memories.”

Pike lurched a few feet away, then halted. The man levered open his door and emerged. Squat, wearing a wool suit, he held an old-fashioned satchel in his left hand. He extended his right hand, and Westbrook shook it.

“My name is Doctor Iatros. Take me to a quiet, unfrequented place where we might talk. Quickly. Cockaigne needs you as soon as possible.”

Many staunch words of comfort from Dormender and vast quantities of reassuring petting from Aniatris and Yodsess had been needed to calm the lumpkin enough to secure speech from the creature. At first, when encountered in the foothills of the Sugar Mountains, the quivering, frightened little furball (when standing, only as tall as the shins of the godlings) had retracted all its limbs and tried to hide behind an outcropping of pink-veined rock candy. Prodded from its niche, the lumpkin had deliberately rolled toward the nearby Great Gravy River as if to drown itself. Rescued from this fate, the timorous citizen of Cockaigne had required fully an hour of coaxing to reach the point where it could sensibly converse.

“Now, lumpkin,” cajoled Dormender, “speak truly of what drove you to fear us, the legendary protectors of your race.”

The lumpkin’s voice piped bitterly. “Many and many a century have passed since any of your kind walked the Land to offer a shield or sword on our behalf. The only one of your breed remaining never leaves Castel Djurga. And he is no friend to any who dares trespass on the Jumbles.”

“The Jumbles?” queried Aniatris. “What unknown territory do you name?”

“For hundreds of parasangs around Castel Djurga, the Land has been rendered fulsomely and morbidly rebarbative. No feature of the landscape offers solace or nourishment, the rude denizens affright, and the very sunlight that falls heavily there abrades the skin.”

Yodsess smacked her mailed fist upon a cinnamon gumdrop big as a hassock. The sweet boulder absorbed the force of her blow, but not the sting of her words. “The Land bordering Castel Djurga was always the fairest spot in this paradise, a harmonious precinct of laughing waters and succulent pasturage! How could it now be so perverted?”

Dormender frowned. “Only through the madness of our comrade Theriagin, I fear.”

Aniatris quizzed the lumpkin further. “You cite unkind inhabitants of these Jumbles. Are they the starostas?”

“No, worse! Even the starostas are affrighted of the Jumbles-dwellers, and venture not within their grasp. If I may be so bold, these dreadful beings resemble – resemble you, your worships! But primitive, cloddish, puny

travesties of your divine features.”

None of the three divinities had any response to this puzzling information, and after a small amount of additional interrogation, they bade the lumpkin bounce off on his way.

“Too much vilely sweet and egocentric solitude has rendered poor Theriagin a pustule of sickness upon the Land,” Yodsess declaimed.

“Judge not our fellow too harshly,” Dormender urged. “Any of us might have fallen into the same trap.”

“Righting this wrong upon the Land must be our primary duty,” Aniatris reminded them. “Rescue and rehabilitation of Theriagin comes second, if at all.”

“I recall the dark labours we faced when first we arrived in the Land,” Dormender said reflectively. “Those lessons will stand us in good stead now.”

Yodsess raised her sharp labrys called Insight. “Onward then to Castel Djurga!”

Pike had chivvied out the two younger embarrassed kids using the space under the gymnasium’s back stairs as a lovers’ lane. Arranging several scavenged upended plastic milk crates in a rough semicircle on the greasy gravel, he fumed silently while his companions stared worshipfully at the weird Doctor Iatros. The intriguing stranger had refused to answer any of their questions until they were all settled down on their hard waffle-bottomed stools, shielded on three sides by graffiti-scribbled damp concrete. From the mildewy shadows, unpreoccupied observers could look down a long open slope of sunlit grass and spot any intruders long before the conspirators themselves could be surprised.

Once arranged in this manner, with two children to either side, Doctor Iatros began to spin his tale.

“Ten million years ago, I created a world –”

Immediately Pike interrupted with a derisive exclamation. “Shit, man! I thought the dope spiel was lame, but now we get fairytales on top of it!”

“My words are indeed deemed myths in my pocket universe, by those who know no better. Here they are literal facts. But even as myths, they contain much truth. Fairytales too are instructive, but not in the same manner. Now, shall I continue?”

The other three chorused yes, and Pike was forced to consent grudgingly as well.

“Ten million years ago, I created a small universe and named it Cockaigne. It was intended to be an Edenic place, offering its inhabitants an easy life, yet one not without its heroic challenges. Unfortunately, due to my extant immature skills, my universe contained an inherent flaw. A coarseness in the quantum weave allowed all higher intelligences to leak out into the ambient multiverse. I watched with intense dismay as the souls whom I had intended as the guardians of my Land evaporated after only a short existence and pinwheeled away, indestructible but lost, across the cosmos, finding unnatural homes in a myriad of other forms.

“Without sentient guardians to help shape Cockaigne, my creation began to degenerate. Mourning, I left it behind to seek out the original lost inhabitants wherever they might be in the cosmos – a laborious quest, believe

me – and offer them the chance to return and help me repair my beautiful world. I cannot transplant you permanently to your native Land, for the congenital flaw remains, irreparable without destroying the place and starting over. But I have found a way to insure that your visits are frequent and extensive enough to be wholly satisfying and productive and beneficial, both for the Land and your own souls.”

Doctor Iatros fell silent. Westbrook ventured, “Are you, like, God?”

The Doctor laughed and patted his stomach. “With this body? Hardly!”

Hazel said, “Do you have any pictures of Cockaigne?”

“No,” replied Iatros, “for your kind of cameras do not work in the Land.”

Ever practical, Calla asked, “How do we get there and back?”

As his answer, Iatros reached down to the satchel at his feet, opened it, and withdrew a square of blotter paper about the size of an index card. The paper was printed with smeary blue watercolour lines dividing it into four cells; inside each cell a different blurry symbol shone with a faint indigo radiance: sword, spear, double-bladed axe, and flail.

Pike jumped up, nearly banging his head on the under-slab of the stairs. “That’s acid! LSD, pure and simple.”

Iatros paid no heed to the accusation. “These tabs have been soaked in a supraliminal drug of my own devising, tailored to the physiology of your species, which allows your souls to awaken fully and travel astrally to Cockaigne, where they will automatically manifest bodies out of the templates I have installed there. Once embodied, all will come naturally to you. Your return is likewise automatic, upon the timely waning of the drug in your mundane veins. I recommend taking the drug in unison, while maintaining physical contact of some sort. Ideally, to facilitate your temporary abandonment of this world, your psychic rebirth, you should also be naked.”

Pike was beside himself. “Naked! Naked! Now we’re taking orders from a sex pervert too! Have you guys all gone totally nuts?”

“I will not be present when you use the drug. But might I suggest that you make your first experiment soon? I have many lightyears yet to cover in my quest, and I would like to leave you with a supply of the drug while I’m away. But not before you satisfy yourselves as to its use.”

“Right, right,” Pike ranted. “Hook us now for free, then make us pay in blood and sex games. Well, I’m not biting, Doctor Asshole! Let’s just see what the cops have to say about all this.”

Bent over, Pike scuttled for the exit. Halfway there, Iatros called out, “Pike! Recall Castel Djurga!”

Pike stiffened, then collapsed to the gravel. His friends hastened to his side and helped him up, laying him down across several crates. Within minutes his eyes fluttered open, and he reached toward Iatros.

“Hand that stuff over, Doc. Cockaigne needs us.”

Aniatis pulled her begored and steaming spear named Caritas from the guts of the starosta, and the hideous

creature, formerly pinned to the trunk of a broadcloth tree, fell to the turf. The mortally wounded yet still belligerent monster whipped its many suckered tendrils in vain, lisped chthonic obscenities from its psittacine beak, shook its riotous green mane, exuded venom from all its stingers, fangs and barbels, and madly clawed scales off its own teated belly. Darting gracefully in and out of the circle of its lashing mace-like tails, Dormender and Yodsess employed sword and axe to amputate and eventually decapitate the evil being. Upon final expiration the creature released a noxious cloud of puce bodily gas; but knowing the eventuality of this ultimate assault, the three practised attackers had already retreated.

Cleansing their weapons with swatches plucked from the broadcloth trees, the godlings regarded their fallen prey with mixed satisfaction and concern.

“This marks the tenth starosta we have slain ’twixt the Diamond Lanes and Firewater Creek,” noted Dormender, “a region where once their vile kind were extinct. I thought we had battled long and hard in ages past to confine the feeble remnant of their race to the Sherbert Polar Floes.”

Yodsess slung the gleaming Insight over her brawny shoulder. “Cockaigne has slid inevitably a long way back toward the chaotic conditions reigning when first we regained our home.”

“To think that the starostas once cruelly ruled over all the Land,” said Aniatis. “Why Lord Iatros ever created them in the first place, I shall never understand.”

At the mention of Iatros’s name, all the trees bent and the grasses murmured, though no breeze passed.

“Unriddling the ways of our Creator concerns us not,” Yodsess chided. “Our mission must be to reestablish the critical balances we once so carefully engineered.”

“We are over halfway to Castel Djurga,” Dormender said, pointing with pristine Salvor toward the east. “Soon, if the lumpkins spoke accurately, we will cross into the misshapen Jumbles. But at the moment, if memory serves, a covey of Roast Fowls is wont to nest nearby, hard upon a patch of Mead Gourds. Let us refresh ourselves, then make hard march.”

They sallied forth in high spirits then, while the elephant-sized carcass behind them slowly deliquesced into the scorched turf.

Eagerly the four sweaty teens shucked their daypacks and fell with near-unanimous exclamations of relief onto the coarse grass of the clearing.

“Ow!” complained Hazel, “I landed on some kind of pricker!”

“Better than landing on some kind of prick,” Calla dryly observed.

Pike reacted to the bawdy comment unmercifully. After his place-name-triggered faint, from being the biggest detractor of the concept of Cockaigne and their own revealed relationship to the Land, he had switched to the biggest defender of Iatros and his message.

“Shut up, Calla. This has nothing to do with sex. We’re here to find our true home and save it from decay.”

Westbrook shrugged. “We’ll know the truth of it all for sure in a few minutes, won’t we?”

Hazel said, "I still don't see why we couldn't stage this test inside."

Pike patiently explained. "Zonked out in somebody's bedroom, we'd be more likely to get discovered by horrified adults. But no one ever comes up here, except maybe once in a while some other kids. If anybody stumbles on us, they'll think we're just on some kind of nut and berry nudist trip."

"Trip is the right word," said Calla. "Despite everything, I'm still half expecting this stuff to be nothing but acid."

"And if it is plain old LSD – something you've talked about trying more than once, Calla – this setting should be safe and pleasant enough to give us a good trip. Okay, enough talk. Everybody strip."

Westbrook, Hazel and Pike undressed swiftly enough, while Calla hesitated, three-quarters turned away from her friends.

"Oh, come off it, Calla. I've seen you naked plenty of times in the locker room already, and you've got nothing to be ashamed of."

"I can't help being modest, Hazel."

"Modesty won't cut it where we're going," admonished Pike. "When I was out of it under the stairs, I saw vague shapes of the things we have to fight, and they won't care whether you're naked or not before they try to rip your head off."

"Which poses an interesting question," Westbrook said. "Can our bodies here be hurt by whatever happens to us in Cockaigne?"

"Don't know. But if we ever manage to shut up and do it, we'll learn that too."

Naked, the foursome found comfortable spots in the wild pasture in which to sit. A vagrant breeze riffled the fine down on the girls' arms and tightened the boys' scrotums. Pike held the blotter paper. Once settled, he ripped it into quarters and passed the emblomed squares out. Regarding each other with fervent determination, the teenagers placed the chalky papers on their tongues, then linked hands.

Within 90 seconds, their souls were loosed.

The sun climbed across the sky, reached its height, then began to fall, while clouds raced or ambled and wind pimplyed the insensate flesh of the immobile, softly breathing adolescents. Finally their errant spirits returned, relighting their visages.

"Pike, you were *awesome!*"

"That canyon!"

"Those rapids!"

"The way those leopard-deer things ran!"

"What did we call them? I can't quite bring up the name now."

"But there's so much wrongness there to put right!"

Calla held forth her arm. "Feel the spot where the stained-glass thorn went in."

Her friends took turns pressing an area above her wrist.

"So cold, so very cold," Westbrook said.

"All right, all right," Pike admitted. "So we have to be careful. But didn't you feel more or less invincible? Powerful too! What could stand against us in Cockaigne, once we get our bearings?"

"Nothing – so long as we stick together."

Upon first beholding the mad unnatural sprawl of the Jumbles, the trio felt their souls truly quail, for the first time since their return to Cockaigne.

"Can it be that here once stretched the Chocolate Vale?"

"And what of Lemonade Lake and the Doughnut Isles?"

"I bring to mind the gay flocks of Marzipan Macaws that used to darken the skies."

From a promontory they surveyed the cankerous conglomeration that cordoned Castel Djurga, that distant towered and buttressed manse just visible on its own isolated mesa at the centre of the abominable territory. Even the firmament above the Jumbles appeared tainted with smokes and ashes.

A grid of hard-surfaced black streets divided the landscape into harsh lines. Flanking the streets without so much as a blade of grass between them, one tall glass and steel box after another unashamedly revealed their hive-like interiors, lit with actinic lights. The residents of the Jumbles – small simulacra resembling the godlings, dressed in drab uniforms, their faces dull, their voices reedy – rushed into and out of the buildings, clutching rigid cases and small, ear-braced deities to which they ceaselessly prayed. Down the streets, in obedience to coloured signals, raced noxious self-powered carriages.

Dormender spat upon the outcropping of marbled bacon rock on which they stood. "This obscenity touches some dim nightmare in the recesses of my brain."

Aniatis said, "Ever unhappy with his surroundings, Theriagin seeks to recreate what we all willingly left behind."

Yodsess exclaimed, "Ah, of course! Despite his stated dream, to possess all Cockaigne forever, he nonetheless quickly reverted to a facsimile of what he had deliberately abdicated."

The three titans hefted each his weapon: Salvor, Insight and Caritas.

"Further speculation avails us naught. Let us wade through these vermin now, and confront our errant brother."

With seven-league strides they descended into the Jumbles. At the sight of the giants, whose heads topped the second story of each building, the deformed and mindless inhabitants of the Jumbles panicked like ants. Above the sounds of their synthetic screams and the crumpling of metal and crashing of glass, the laughter of the three conquerors rang like rolling thunder, as Caritas spitted, Salvor cleaved, and Insight hewed.

"I don't understand why we can't divide the doses into four sets, and each keep our own."

Westbrook had obviously been brooding on this topic for some time. Confronting Pike now, the homely-looking boy could not hide the indignation in his voice. Pike ignored the provocative tone, and replied matter-of-factly.

"First, Iatros handed the sheaf of hits directly to me, remember? 'Theriagin,' he said, 'I entrust these to you.'"

Supportive of Pike, Calla chimed in. "True. That's what

the Doctor said. Just before he told us he'd be gone for short time."

Pike nodded smugly. "Second, by having a single guardian of the drug, no one can be tempted to make a solo trip to Cockaigne."

"No one but you, that is."

Pike turned on Hazel. "What are you saying? Are you accusing me of visiting Cockaigne alone? Where's your proof?"

"I don't have any proof. Just a suspicion. The last time we were all there, the Land felt different somehow, as if – I don't know! It's so hard to retain impressions and memories from Cockaigne, or even to find the words for them back here on Earth."

"What if I swear to you all by the stones of Castel Djurga that I haven't been cheating? No solo trips. Would that satisfy you?"

Westbrook tentatively said, "I suppose it would have to..."

Calla moved closer to Pike. "I don't know why you two are ganging up on Pike, but I don't like it. We all need to trust each other. Do you want to suspect the comrade guarding your back when a pride of poppyfaces or a school of basikores are attacking? I certainly don't!"

Hazel agreed. "There's no way the Tetrad can succeed in rehabilitating Cockaigne if we don't all work together."

Pike clapped his hands as if gaveling a motion closed. "It's settled, then. I'll hold on to the doses."

"How many do we have again?"

"Fifty four-part blotters. At two trips a week, that's roughly six months' worth. Doctor Iatros will certainly return by then."

Calla shivered. "Six months from now is November. I don't plan on being butt-naked outdoors by then. We're going to have to figure out some other jumping-off place."

Hazel said, "I wish we could afford to go more than twice a week. The time differential between Cockaigne and here cuts two ways. One of our excursions lasts a long time in Cockaigne's frame. But between trips a lot of time continues to pass. I hate going back and seeing stuff we worked so hard on wrecked by the starostas. Just look at the mess they made of Bugtown."

"True. But twice a week is a good compromise. Spacing out the trips this way actually allows us to gauge the long-term effects of our actions. Aren't you glad we got to see the consequences of nearly eliminating the Sewing Needles, before we totally exterminated them?"

Westbrook grimaced. "Major screwup! None of the Turkey Trees got pollinated."

"It's hard to be a god," Pike said.

"Gods," said Hazel, frowning. "Hard to be *gods*."

They paused, breathing stertorously, to lean upon the gore-slick machicolations and crenellations of Castel Djurga. In this brief lull from carnage, there obtained no time for such niceties as cleaning of nicked steel or bold asseverations of justice. The sole task the three tattered and wounded warriors could focus on was filling their labouring lungs with air enough to battle anew.

Reaching the foot of the bluff upon which loomed Castel Djurga had presented no real challenges. The puny

mock-citizens of the Jumbles had offered no substantial resistance, fleeing madly or at the most hurling small harmless pebbles from noisy hand-throwers. At the base of the bluff, Aniatis, Yodsess and Dormender had halted before setting eager foot upon the Adamantine Stairs. Halfway up they had met the first line of Theriagin's inner defences, a barrage of razor-headed hoopsnakes tumbling down the narrow way. Upon sighting their foes, the snakes had loosened teeth from tail to arrow futilely at the armoured bosoms of the invaders. Meeting that assault successfully, the trio hastened forward, reaching the pastille-tiled top of the butte, only to encounter wave after wave of enslaved malignant beings. In a frenzy of slaughter the godlings dispatched spike-tailed, acid-dripping, scalpel-toothed beasts by the bloody scores, amidst a furious storm of shrieking, scratching and snarling. All the while they wept at seeing Castel Djurga – where many and many happy, peaceful years had been passed with song and laughter and sensual dalliance – so besmirched.

Their goal was the Council Chamber on the highest level, where they intuitively sensed Theriagin had closeted himself.

Now, interrupting their hardfought recess, a last-ditch wave of defenders sought to overwhelm them. More in the nature of domestic servitors than soldiers, these imps and halflings nonetheless brandished implements of potential harm. Tearful yet determined, the godlings perforce slew them all.

At the wide brass-studded double doors of the Council Chamber, they hammered defiantly. Her flaming hair clotted with alien matter, Yodsess shouted, "Theriagin, your long-delayed bane arrives! Open for your doom!"

The doors swung soundlessly apart under no man's hand, and the three avengers entered.

A stalwart figure, brawny of torso and wry of lips, Theriagin confronted them from the far wall of the tapestried, raftered room. They halted, and Aniatis said, "Advance, traitor."

"Alas, I cannot greet you properly, old friends. My situation is rather, ah, inflexible."

Moving cautiously closer, all quickly realized what Theriagin meant.

Their comrade of yore formed a living bas-relief, integral with the wall of Castel Djurga. Soul melded to stone, only the frontward third of his body, including his entire arms but not his legs, retained an independent existence from the marmoreal stratum.

"Only thus," said Theriagin, "and at such price, did I insure my solid anchoring in this realm throughout all these lonely centuries."

Dormender cursed. "And so you chose perpetual tainted exile over any sane return! Now you can only die!"

Heeding Dormender's decisively voiced declaration even before it ceased ringing in the air, Yodsess broke from the others and, ululating wildly, with axe upraised, plunged toward the tethered villain.

Theriagin's right hand, concealed in shadow till this fatal moment, swung up, bearing Success, the flail. Yod-

sess either failed to see the threat or cared not for her own safety.

The barbed chains of the flail wrapped around the woman's neck, and Theriagin yanked.

The sound of Yodsess's death-impelled axe cleaving the mortal breastbone of the granite-backed godling coincided with the sharp crack of her own snapping spine.

Amidst the debris of a small New Year's Eve party, the four teenagers, alone together, unsupervised by adults, huddled mournfully after all their cheerful peers had departed.

"What are we going to do now?" Hazel moaned. "He's overdue by two months."

"I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm really hurting," said Westbrook. "Without Cockaigne, the rest of my life seems like a joke."

Calla's hand sought Pike's. "That's just how I feel too. What good is the future, if we can never return to the Land? How can we grow up without Cockaigne? The whole experience is already fading, like some kind of wonderful, impossible dream."

Pike patted Calla's hand, then released it. "Have faith. Doctor Iatros will come back sooner or later."

"But till then – how do we go on?"

No one had an answer. And after a short silent time of being alone with their thoughts, Westbrook strode off with Hazel into the empty new year.

Calla fell into Pike's arms. He cradled her with a certain remoteness. "If only the four of us had just one more dose apiece," she murmured.

"I have one more dose. For myself."

Calla shot out of his tepid embrace. "What!"

"You heard me. I kept a dose aside. Several sheets, actually. But they've all been used up except for one last hit. I'm going into Cockaigne tonight, Calla – and I'm not coming out."

"But, but – that's impossible!"

"No, it's not. On my earlier solo trips, I learned how to get around the inherent flaw of Iatros's creation. There's a price to pay, but it will all be worth it. The sacrifice is a non-issue."

"Caitiff bastard!" Eyes leaking behind her glasses,

Calla balled her fist and raised it as if to strike Pike. He awaited her assault patiently, until, quivering, she finally dropped her unclenched hand and threw herself on him.

"Pike, don't go! Wait with us, please. Iatros will return soon, I know it. Pike, if you stay, I – I'll sleep with you!"

Delving beneath her shirt, Pike said, "Oh, really?"

Calla made no reply, but lowered her eyes and began to unbutton her blouse.

When they had finished having sex, after Calla had fallen asleep in his arms, Pike, still naked as he must be for transit, disengaged himself without waking her, removed his wallet from his pants pocket, took out a tab of blotter paper, and slipped it beneath his tongue.

The frantically beeping equipment revealed that all of Pike's vital signs had flatlined, his 20-year coma ended. Unbreathing also, Westbrook, spine shattered, lay contorted like a broken doll upon the linoleum floor.

Donning their clothes quickly yet without any signs of agitation, Hazel and Calla failed even to flinch when the banging started on the jammed door of Pike's room. What terror could such mundane assaults hold?

After shrugging into her coat and slipping on her shoes, Hazel bent to kiss tenderly Westbrook's cooling brow. "Always did fiery Yodsess exhibit more bravery than caution."

"The Land will enshrine her name forever."

As an ethereal gleam faded from their eyes, the women hugged each other, then moved toward the door.

"If he found Westbrook after so long –" began Calla.

"Then, Dormender, plainly Iatros can find us," finished Hazel.

"And when he does, Aniatis?"

"What else? Would you have all this death among the Tetrads be for naught? We return. We return to Cockaigne."

Paul Di Filippo's most recent published novel is *Joe's Liver* (Cambrian Publications, 2000). His most recent short stories here were "Angelmakers" (IZ 141), "Stealing Happy Hours" (IZ 153) and "Singing Each to Each" (IZ 155 – there was also an interview with him in that issue). Paul continues to live in Providence, Rhode Island, USA.



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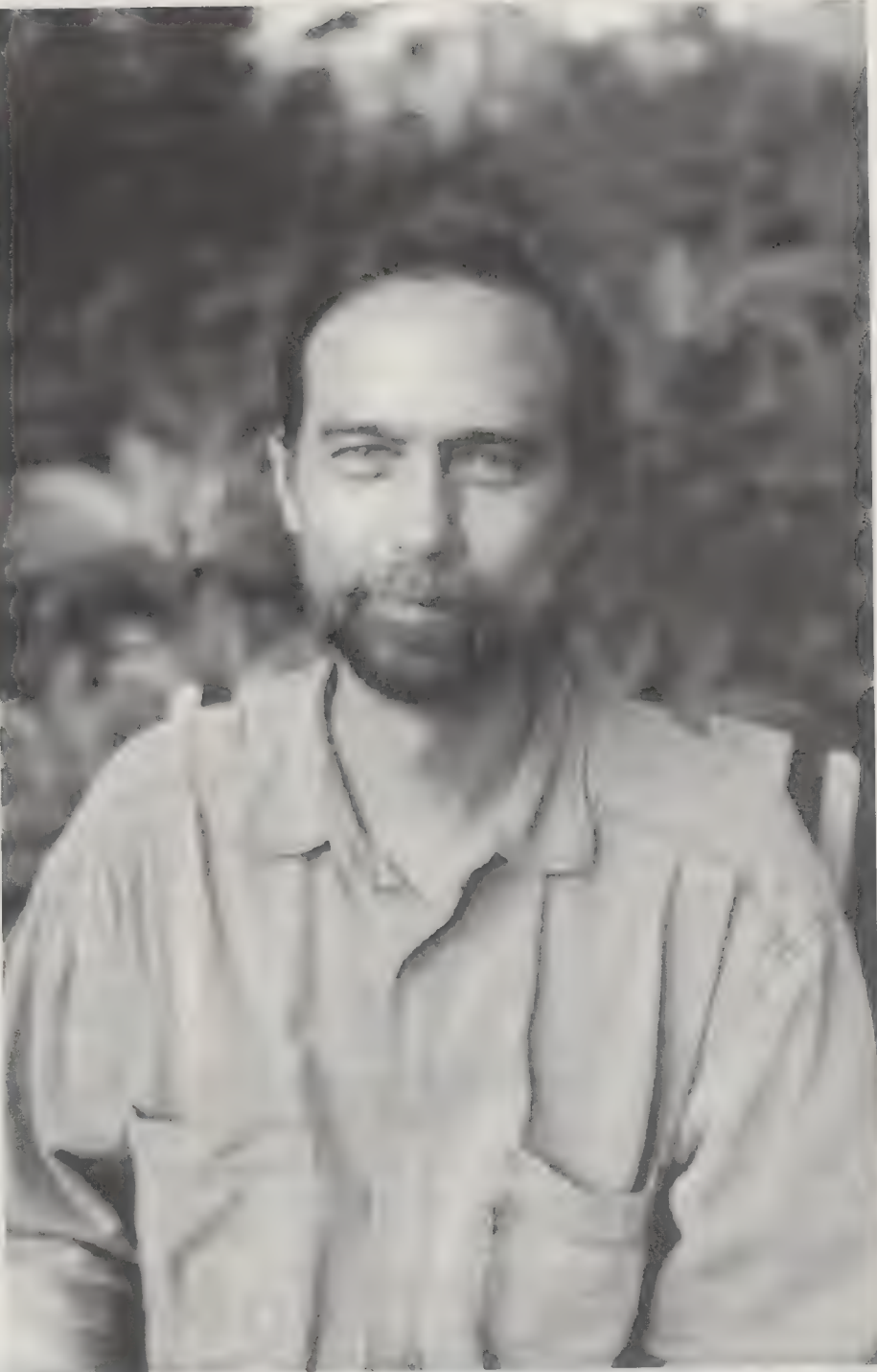
Ottawa Urban Fantasist

Charles de Lint

interviewed by

Jayme Lynn Blaschke

The author of more than two dozen novels and collections ranging from high fantasy to horror to science fiction, Canadian writer Charles de Lint is best known for his pioneering work in the sub-genre of urban fantasy. Unusual among novelists in that he continues to put out a strong body of short fiction, de Lint's work often examines social issues and the disenfranchised in the mythical North American city of Newford. An accomplished Celtic musician, de Lint performs regularly with his wife and business partner, MaryAnn Harris – a passion which shows up regularly in his fiction.



*You've explored specific themes in your recent novels: family, individuality, etc. What kinds of themes do you tackle in your new novel, *Forests of the Heart*?*

I'm pretty much fixated on certain themes. Family, but it's family of choice as much as family of blood. Individuality, yes, but not at the cost of others' happiness. Be true to your friends. Remembering to find some wonder and hope in the world. Basically it boils down to: treat people like you'd like them to treat you, leave the world a little better than it was when you got here, respect others and stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves.

So how does this new novel differ from your previous work?

It's more of a continuation than something radically different. I see my writing as a journey and each book and story takes me a little further along the way. Expanding on the themes, finding new ways to express them. Of course I love character and story, too, and never want to get heavy-handed with "messages." I prefer to let them grow out of the action and interaction between characters.

This time out, Newford's in deep winter, we spend some time in Arizona, some time in the spiritworld, meet mostly new faces, with cameos from a few old friends.

Since The Little Country, everything you've written has been set in Newford. Do you make any special efforts to keep things fresh? Is becoming too close to the city and its inhabitants – repeating yourself – ever a concern?

Of course it's a concern. But one of the things I usually do with the novels is make sure that they're primarily about new characters with the regular cast on the sidelines, so they stay as fresh as any new book should be. I haven't tired of Newford yet, but I have been exploring some of its environs, particularly in the novels. The short stories are where I revisit the old gang more and catch up on all the new gossip.

My theory about writing is that one should write books you'd like to read, but no one else has written yet. So, as long as I stick with that, I'm entertaining myself, and then hopefully my readers as well. I hope to God I realize that I'm repeating myself, if I ever do. But if I don't, I'm sure my readers will let me know.

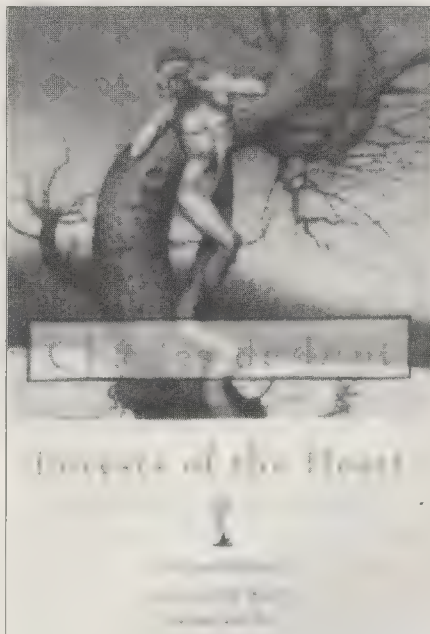
Family is a recurring theme in your works, but "traditional" families seldom appear in your work. Juveniles are uncommon in your fiction, and when they do appear, they're invariably part of single-parent households. Your adult characters come from broken homes, are survivors of abuse and molestation. Where does this negative view of the traditional family come from?

Well, while I didn't have the more extreme experiences of some of my characters, I didn't exactly come from the most normal of households. Or rather, it was normal, in that dysfunctional families appear to be the norm.

But the real reason I write about those sorts of characters is that what I'm interested in reading and writing about is outsiders. The people that don't fit in. Whether they're the Louis L'Amour gunslingers with their strong moral codes, the Ivanhoes and Robin Hoods that leapt off the page and screen when I was growing up, or whether they're the hurt and lost, trying to find some way to at least survive, if they can't fit in, the outsider is born story material.

And I suppose, having grown up feeling like an outsider myself – partly from moving around so much as I did as a kid which doesn't allow one to make long-term connections – and knowing outsiders throughout my life – everyone from criminals to people involved in creative endeavours – I'm following that tried-and-true writing advice and writing about what I know.

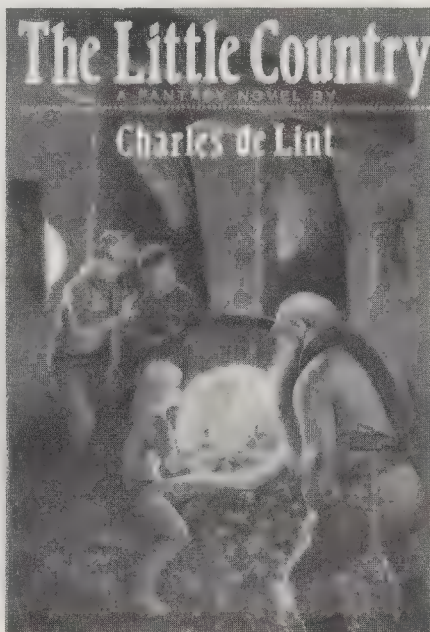
You've long been an advocate for children's causes. "Don't! Buy! Thai!" is featured prominently on your website.



What prompted your involvement in this? How does this intersect with your work?

I believe it's our responsibility as adults to ensure that all children have a safe and healthy upbringing. So I make it a point to support advocates of children's right and to raise the issues in my fiction, hopefully as part of the story rather than a lecture. Any abusive relationship angers me, but when children are the victims, it seems that much more despicable.

The "Don't! Buy! Thai!" campaign that highlights the problems in Thailand, where basically a child-sex tourism industry is still thriving, addresses only one problem area, but one has to pick and choose the battles,



or else risk the chance that the battle-front becomes too spread out to be effective. I think it's a good place to add one voice to many, that louder voice having more chance to be heard. But one shouldn't ignore the smaller issues, or those closer to home either.

You mentioned that you identify with the loner, the outcast. With a few exceptions, the characters in your fiction are outcasts on the fringe of society: Artists, loners, homeless... Is this a case of writing what you know, or writing about what interests you?
The point of writing about such characters is to humanize them. And there are so many stories there. The creative artist/writer/musician has the same fears and frailties as the rest of us, no matter how much they might be put on a pedestal. What turns someone to a life of crime, or makes them a loner? Street people are individuals, too. It's instructive to learn what put them there. We shouldn't have a society where some of its members are reduced to living on the street, but until taxpayers view them as people, things won't change.

I want to tell these stories, and not romanticize them. I use the fantasy genre as my backdrop, because I also like a little wonder in a story. I suppose I'm a "glass half full" sort of a person, aiming to raise hopes. Which isn't to knock something like Zak Mucha's *The Beggar's Shore* (published by Red 71 Press) which I thought was brilliant. We need those dark stories, too. We need to see all sides of the issue.

In Forests of the Heart you deal with both Old World and New World mythology – fey, manitou, etc. You've worked with these different traditions before in Moonheart and Spiritwalk, and dealt with the conflicts between the two traditions in the two Jack of Kinrowan books. Why revisit these concepts now?

The difference here is, I'm dealing with some darker elements. Without wanting to sound too high-faluting, I was using the Irish spirits to explore the ongoing relevancy of "the Troubles" in Ireland, even for people who have been gone from the homeland for generations. I was also exploring family units, as you'll see when you get a chance to read the book. Of course none of this relates only to Ireland; it's just what I chose to focus on.

I also – perhaps in reaction to all the "all things Celtic are fascinating and noble" sentiment that pervades a lot of fantasy fiction, some of my own included – wanted to bring on-stage some less than reputable proponents of the Celtic Twilight.

In this book, your protagonist is Hispanic/Indian. Did you establish this setup with the more tragic aspects of the European settlement of the Americas in mind?

That was certainly a large part of it. One can't live in North America and not be touched by the tragedies that were inflicted upon the continent's indigenous people. ("How could Columbus discover us?" a chief once commented. "We were never lost.") And of course the sad truth is that Natives are still being screwed, left, right and centre.

I've also been tying together the various elements from a number of the books and short stories, not to produce a cohesive whole to make some sort of a statement, but because I find it interesting to see how even the most disparate threads have analogies from work to work. Not so surprising, perhaps, when one considers that most authors have one story to tell – at least those blessed/cursed with some fierce need to tell stories. They simply approach that one Story from as many different angles as they can.

Latin America, in particular, has a vibrant, living mythology – European beliefs, Catholicism and native folklore fused into a unique hybrid. Is it inevitable that people bring their mythic beliefs with them wherever they go, establishing new traditions?

Not necessarily. It depends on how strong their traditions are. Some will come to a new land and take nothing from it, forcing their beliefs on those they find living there. But I love the mix of Latin American myths, how the Saints and the Virgin are considered spirits, and intermediaries, rather

*"I suppose I'm a
'glass half full'
sort of a person,
aiming to
raise hopes"*

than actual members of the pantheon. And of course the imagery is fabulous.

Forests of the Heart takes place, partly, in the Sonoran Desert around Tucson, Arizona. This isn't the first time you've set stories there. What's the appeal?

I just love that area. MaryAnn and I keep thinking we'll move there, but little things like the high cost of medical insurance keep us here. Mind you, once there, I wonder how soon I'd be missing the seasons and the Eastern Woodlands? But the Sonoran Desert has long had an appeal for me – before I even went there the first time. When I finally did make it, I felt as though I'd come home. There's something about the spirit of the place that fills empty places inside me. Since we don't live there, we at least try to get down there every couple of years to recharge the batteries, as it were.

How important is "the setting" to a story in your work?

Very. It's another character as far as I'm concerned. In *Forests* there's a huge ice-storm that brings the entire city to a halt and that was as much an important part of the story as the more individual characters going about their business. The spiritworld

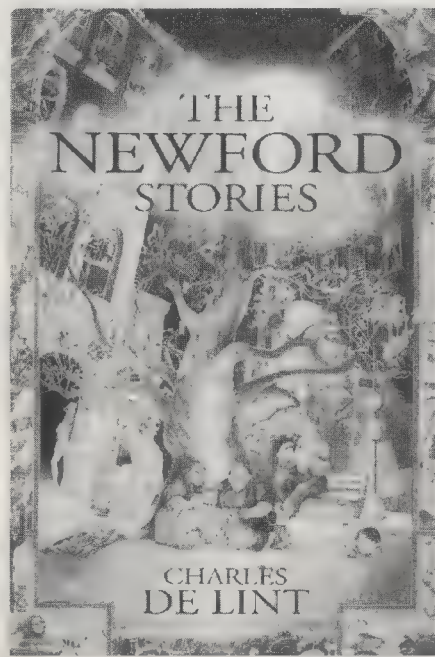
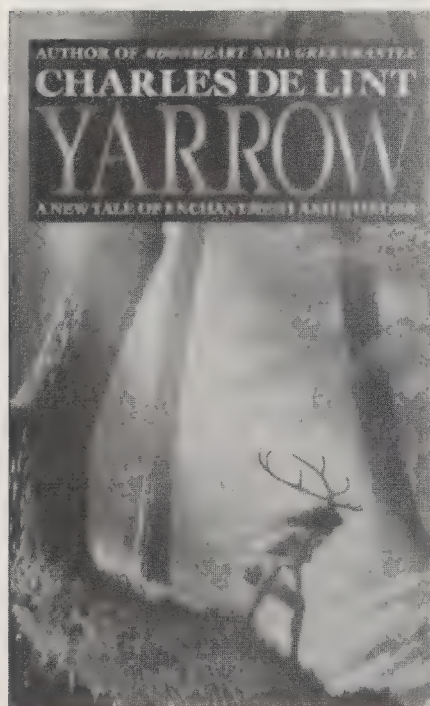
– at least in how it relates to the Newford stories – gets more defined in it as well, and even more so in the book I'm currently working on, *The Onion Girl*. I think after *The Onion Girl*, we won't be visiting the spiritworld for awhile, certainly not in the next book I've got planned.

You have one contemporary fantasy set outside of North America: The Little Country takes place in Cornwall. Why Cornwall? Why not Newford's Lower Crowsea or Ottawa?

Originally, only the first chapter was going to be set in Mousehole. This was because an old friend of mine used to tell me all these stories about the place so I thought it would be fun to start off a book there. Around the time I was getting ready to start the book, we were planning a trip to the UK anyway, so I decided to wait before I did any actual work on the book, meaning to do a little on-site research for that chapter. Well, one thing led to another and I liked the area so much and had the time to do enough serious research that I decided to set the whole book there. Set elsewhere, it would have been a different book. Not better or worse, simply different. But I'm happy I made the decision I did.

You've said Newford was created as an outlet for stories you couldn't tell using Ottawa as a backdrop. How do those stories differ? What makes a story inherently "Ottawa" or "Newford?"

Newford is a much larger, grittier urban centre than Ottawa. It's that simple. There's no Tombs, for instance, where many stories are set, and Newford has a much wider population base than Ottawa – though that changes each year as Ottawa gets larger and more urban.



Over the years, you've tied your various sets of stories together loosely. There are even some shared characters with your earlier high fantasy works. Was this a conscious effort on your part to draw together the various threads of your writing, or was it serendipitous?

The only real reason for self-referencing is the fun factor. It's fun for the writer, getting little peeks at what old characters might be up to. And it's fun for readers to spot a familiar face, or pick up on a made-up book title or something from an earlier story. I don't know that it does – or even should – contribute to the story in hand being any better than it would have been without it. I like to keep the two "worlds," if you will, fairly separate. Which isn't to say that it would never happen.

The dominant form of myth in modern fantasy is that of a British Isles / Celtic descent. What's the appeal?

It's the dominant form because that's what Tolkien did. A lot of people, when they do fantasy, they figure they've got to do what Tolkien did. It's partly laziness, but partly because

that's what people want as well. I'm not sure if people want it because they're slightly xenophobic. It's like when you see a book that has all oriental characters in it, the cover's all white people. I mean, it's just weird. It's like they're trying to not scare people off. I don't know who it is – the publishers or the writers themselves – but it seems that people kind of shy away from unfamiliar mythologies or folk material.

So how does that explain the popularity of Native American mythology?

That's due to the 1960s I think – you know, when it was cool to be an Indian. It's true. Up unto that point it never was, then all of the sudden in the '60s everyone decided that the Native Americans were "caretakers of the Earth" and they wore all these cool beads. The thing I find most offensive about that idea – that all Native Americans are all one religion, or one cultural base – is that there are tons of different tribes that are really, really different. Some of them don't even like each other. It's just ordinary people. That's something that always strikes me.

Do you try to address those kinds of issues when you use the Kickaha Tribe?

Sometimes. The Kickaha, I made them up because I wanted them to have certain aspects. It's loosely based on an Algonquin language group, so I leave in certain things specific to that. I just wanted to have that opening to be able to throw in a few other things, like some of the animal-people stuff that I didn't find in that tradition. Like Coyote. Now, although coyotes are physically in eastern woodlands, they're not in the folklore. The tricksters are different. There's Whiskey Jack and there's a hare, stuff like that. But I just like Coyote, so I wanted to be able to use him. So it's not a matter of me trying to marginalize the Native beliefs, it's more a matter of my trying to use a specific kind of idea but not based on anything that's real, simply because I wanted the freedom to explore without Native peoples saying, "Well you can't say that, that's not what we believe." Because I don't know – I'm not a Native American. I can't write from that perspective.

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The Children of Winter

Eric Brown

In my 18th term, which was also the last term of winter, I fell in love with a Blue, lost my youth, and learned the truth – and to learn the truth, after so long living in ignorance, can be a terrible revelation.

The three of us were inseparable, then. After lessons we skated the ice-canals of Ak-helion beneath the sable skies of winter. At night we'd huddle around the brazier of an itinerant food-vendor, chewing on roasted tubers. The square was a scintillating sheet of ice, framed on three sides by the ugly stone buildings of the city; the fourth side looked down into the mountain valley, or would do so when the sun arrived to light the view.

We were swaddled in protective clothing like lagged boilers, so that it was an effort to bend our arms to eat the tubers. Nani giggled as she tried to nibble the long, steaming root. Oh, she was so beautiful, her every gesture a delight. She was, also, inaccessible: we had been friends for most of our lives, but she was in love with Kellor, and how could I begrudge my best friend the love of the girl I also secretly cherished?

The vendor closed his brazier, picked up its reins and dragged it away on its skates to another venue, leaving behind a puddle of slush that froze over within seconds.

Kellor whooped with the delight of being young and skated away on one leg, showing off to Nani. I looked around the square, at the dark buildings that merged with the night, and then I saw it. Between the Governor's

manse and the library building, a tiny bright pin-prick in the dark sky, the Star.

"Kellor!" I cried. "Nani! Come here!"

They skated to my side, each catching a shoulder to halt themselves, and almost dragged me to the ground.

"What is it, Jen?" Nani panted.

"Look," I said, "the Star..."

We stared, our breaths clouding the air before us.

Nani whispered something to herself. Kellor said, "To the city wall!"

We set off pell-mell. We careered down ice-canals and alleys, taking corners at speed with little thought for other skaters. The city wall was a long dam-like structure built across the valley, where often after lessons we met to stare in wonder at the fiery magnificence of the galactic spiral as it flung its starry arms high overhead.

Today it was as if our Star had detached itself from the shoal and was drifting towards us – but that was my poetic imagination, misinforming me.

When we were nine terms old, Kellor, a practical-minded scientist even then, had explained to me the physics of our celestial situation.

He had taken me to the square and skated in a long oval around the brazier of a food-vendor, tilting his blades to score a long ellipse in the ice. Then he returned and took my arm, dragging me with him.

"I thought you were going to show me –" I began.

He laughed in indulgent reprimand and explained. "We – us two – are our planet, Fortune," he said. "That –" pointing to the distant brazier "– is the Star. We move around it in an oval orbit. Now we are far away, so far away that we cannot feel the heat of the Star. But, as we approach – see, the coals grow brighter. We move closer and feel the heat, and as we pass by the heat is intense, but only briefly. The period of our summer is just four terms – any longer and Fortune would burn to a cinder. And then we begin the long, slow arc into winter again, the Star diminishing behind us as we move away. The winter lasts for 18 terms, the Star virtually disappears and the cold and ice descends – until, in time, we swing back towards the Star for another short and fiery summer... Now do you understand, you dreamer?"

I was dumb-struck with the wonder of it. "But," I began, coming to understand something for the very first time, "that is why they call us the Children of Winter. We were born with the coming of winter, and will be initiated when winter ends!"

Kellor, even at nine, managed an adult's patronizing smile. "When we are 18 terms old," he said grandly, "the ice will melt and our initiation will coincide with the emergence of the starship."

Now we were 18, that magical age, and it seemed to me that life had never been so rich and full of promise.

Our initiation was just one week away.

We screamed down a steep conduit that in spring would drain the melt-water from the city and into the valley, but which now was a near vertical channel of breakneck ice. The conduit levelled out and we raced onto the span of the wall. To our right was the lambent arch of the galaxy; straight ahead, low in the night sky, the lone light of the setting Star.

We huddled in a niche in the wall, out of the rapier-keen wind from the north. Nani stared down the valley, her big eyes highlighting the glow of the galactic aura, and I felt my heart leap with love. She shook her head with finality. "I can't see the starship," she reported.

"The sun's not bright enough, yet," Kellor said. "It sheds little light. And anyway, the ship's a mile or more away, and hidden in a ravine. Only when the ice melts..."

I felt my heart hammer with another emotion, then. How fortunate we were! We were the Children of Winter, born on the very cusp of the summer-winter divide, so that our initiation ceremony would take place with the emergence of the starship – actually within the hallowed vault of the ship itself. Other citizens, those born either side of winter, would not share our luck: either their 18th term would come about when the starship was still entombed in layers of ice, or when the molten heat of high summer made a pilgrimage to the ship impossible.

I felt Nani's mittened hand on mine. "Jen," she whispered. "Recite your poem."

Kellor snorted. He had little time for my sentimental verse.

I cleared my throat and stared at the distant light of the Star. "We are Winter's Children," I began, "Conceived with Summer's last breath/ Born to the first steel-hard

frosts of Winter/ Our characters, our very souls, forged in sunless hardship and sleeting snows/ To learn the Truth when Summer unveils the ship..."

"The Truth," Kellor laughed. "Mark my word, it'll be nothing but political mumbo-jumbo. Our elders exhorting us to high morals and good-citizenship."

"I don't think so," I said. "I've watched those who've been initiated in the past. They seem..." I shook my head. "I don't know, somehow *changed*. As if life seems different in light of what they've learned."

Kellor was derisory. "You'd think that this so-called truth would leak out, no? That some initiate wouldn't be able to contain themselves, that they'd tell us what they've learned."

"Perhaps the truth is so... so shattering that they cannot bring themselves to talk –" I began.

A sound from along the wall halted our speculation. We froze, listening. From afar came the muffled chug of a steam engine. "Blues!" Kellor cried in delight.

We peered from the niche. Sure enough, below us on the road that ran parallel with the city wall, a great steam-wagon made its lumbering way. Its spiked wheels bit into the ice, clawing it forward, and two figures could be seen riding high in the uncovered cab.

The Blues were native to Fortune and it seemed to me that, by their aloof manners and insistence that they keep contact with us to a minimum, they resented our arrival here millennia ago. Even their erect postures spoke of some genetic disdain. But perhaps what I found most daunting about these creatures, similar to us though they were, was their pale blue skins and their ability to go without winter clothing. It was as if their acceptance of the cold mocked my dependency – I was winter-born, after all – on thick breeches, a quilted overcoat, hat and gloves.

"Let's attack them!" Kellor cried, and so saying scraped up a snowball from the ground and lobbed it at the passing wagon. Nani followed suit, but I held back.

The Blues lived in the high mountains, far north of Akhelion. They came in their steam-wagons from time to time, trading pots and utensils for the harl-meat and the other foodstuffs we produced. A few Blues lived in the city, liaising between their kind and our traders. Whenever I saw one I was struck dumb by their otherness, their silence and grace, their strange ethereal beauty. I could never bring myself to despise these people, as we were taught to do. Still less could I bring myself to pelt them with snowballs.

They passed below, dignified in their dismissal of the missiles falling around them. As I watched, the passenger turned its head and stared up at us. She was a female of fragile beauty, her face as pale blue and translucent as the egg of a snowbird. It seemed that for a second our gazes met, and I willed into my expression an apology for the behaviour of my compatriots.

Later, when the steam-wagon had departed, we raced the length of the city wall, whooping with the fact of our being 18 and free, and soon to be initiated.

Kellor looked up at the rearing galactic arm. From the mass of stars displayed he declared it late and time for

bed. He departed with Nani, but I guessed from their manner – the almost coy propinquity of the intimate – that they would not be sleeping alone tonight.

I set off home. I skated slowly along the city wall and climbed the ice-bound stone steps to the city proper. I crossed the square where we had eaten tubers. It was late; even the food-vendors had doused their braziers and retired. Only the harl, the shaggy quadrupeds that drew passenger-sleds during the day, occupied the shadows, emitting steam and contented snores.

I was skating down the broad boulevard toward the street on which I lived, in a big government house with my mother and father, when I heard the noise.

At first I thought it was a harl in distress. I slid to a halt and listened. The sound came again, a thin, high sobbing. I moved towards its source, peering into the stone channel which flanked the road. At the foot of a steep flight of stairs to a tall town-house, I made out a figure lying in the shadows. Impeded by my skates, I climbed down.

"It's okay," I said. "I'll get help."

I stopped, then, for the face of a Blue was staring up at me. I stood and backed off.

It reached out a hand. "Please. I fell and hurt my ankle." The voice was soft, a mere breath, and feminine. "If you could assist me inside." And she gestured to the door at the top of the steps.

My first impulse was to run; my second, to my credit, was to aid the Blue as she requested. I removed my skates, then knelt and lifted her to her good foot; I put an arm around her and assisted her slowly up the steps. She leaned against me, and I was astonished at how light and insubstantial she was. At the top of the steps she pushed open the door and pointed down the corridor to another.

With my help she moved around her apartment turning on yellow, glowing lamps. The room, revealed, was much like any other: perhaps I had expected something as alien as the Blue herself. Oils of winter landscapes adorned the walls, sculptures of winter-stark trees stood on shelves and tables. I had, in my ignorance, never credited the aliens with an appreciation of art.

She sat on a chair beside a glowing lamp and inspected her ankle. For the first time I became aware of what she was wearing: a thin red dress and a slighter heavier black, hooded cape. She was probing her ankle with delicate fingers, and wincing.

I knelt and took her foot in my hand. "I... I don't think it's broken," I said. "Perhaps it's just badly twisted. Ah... maybe a bandage?" I looked up, and was shocked to behold the regard of her great black eyes.

"It is you," she said. "I thought so."

"Excuse me?"

"Earlier, upon the city wall. Two children cast balls of ice at our wagon. You were with them, but did not join the attack."

"You were in the wagon," I said. I recalled the cool regard of the Blue passenger, and my shame at the antics of my friends.

"I... I'm sorry. It was... they didn't mean to hurt you.

It was just a game."

She regarded me with a quizzical expression. For all our differences, our far-flung origins, we had much in common. She said, "But you refrained from joining in the attack. I thought your people deemed us... beneath contempt. Certainly that is the impression I receive from those of you I work with from day to day."

"We aren't all like that. Some of us..." I stopped myself, for fear of sounding sanctimonious.

"Do you know that many of your kind would have let me lie there all night," she said. "I am indeed fortunate that you were passing."

Her stare was making me uncomfortable. She smiled and told me that I would find a bandage in the kitchen. I stood and hurried into the adjacent room.

When I returned I saw that she had taken off her cloak. I could not help but notice the delicacy of her arms and legs, her high-cheekboned face framed in a long fall of jet black hair.

Clumsily I wrapped the bandage around her swollen ankle.

"What is your name," she asked.

"Jen," I whispered, not meeting her eyes.

"And how old are you, Jen?"

"Eighteen."

"But so am I!" she declared. "And my name is Ki."

"You're 18? But I thought..." She seemed much older; something in her poise, her confidence, suggested the maturity of an adult.

"Among my people, at 16 terms we are considered mature, and we can go about the business of the elders." Her large black eyes seemed to bore into me. "If you are 18 terms," she said now, "then very soon you will be initiated."

"In six days," I began.

Something in her regard made me uneasy. I stood suddenly. "I must go," I said. "It's late. Be careful with the ankle. Don't put any weight on it." I hurried to the door. "Goodbye."

A half-smile played on her lips as she watched me leave the room. I put on my skates and sped home, only then realizing what had occurred. I had conversed with a Blue, broken the unspoken rule that contact between our races was forbidden, except in certain circumstances. I wondered what Kellor and Nani might have to say about my encounter, not that I intended to tell them.

My mother and father were still up when I returned, reading by lamp-light in the front room. I slipped past the door and hurried up to bed. I was not close to them at the best of times, but something – was it shame? – stopped me from pausing to wish them goodnight.

That night I dreamed of Ki. It was a dream full of horror and... something else. I awoke in a sweat, an hour before I had to rise for college, then lay back and tried to recall the rapidly vanishing images of Ki, naked, in my arms.

The words "day" and "night," Kellor once explained to me, were derived from the time when Fortune experienced its brief, hot summer. The planet, he said, turned on its axis

every 20 hours, so that for successive periods of ten hours every day during summer the sky above Ak-helion was light and then dark. During winter the sky was perpetually dark, but even so we still divided the day into periods of hours, and called one lot day and another night, for convenience. I had lived all my life in night-time darkness, and found it hard to imagine a daylight sky.

However, change was on the way. Now the Star was in the sky during the day, and at night it set. At college the following day, after my encounter with Ki, I sat at my desk and stared out at the small beacon of the Star, contemplating the forthcoming initiation and the changes that would follow.

In less than a term the ice with which I was so familiar, with which I had lived all my life, would be no more. It would melt and like drinking water run off down the mountain, leaving the rocks bare and inhospitable, and then the heat would start to climb. Soon it would be impossible to live out in the open, and we would retire, the entire population of the city, to a cool sanctuary excavated deep below the mountain long ago. Four or five terms later we would re-emerge to populate Ak-helion again. I wondered if I would adapt to life underground.

I sat with Kellor and Nani in the refectory at lunch. Soon the conversation came around to the subject of the starship.

"I've been thinking," Kellor said, smiling slyly at me, "why don't we leave the city and go to the ravine of the starship ourselves, sneak a quick look before the ceremony?"

The suggestion was as foolhardy as it was profane. Nani gasped at the very idea.

I laughed. "You're not serious, are you?"

"Aren't I? Why not?"

Nani said, "Because it *isn't* allowed!" and made a chopping gesture with her mittened hand. "It just isn't allowed!"

"If we were caught..." I began, heartened that Nani was on my side. I had never heard of anyone trying to view the starship before the ceremony. I looked at Kellor as if he were mad.

"We'll talk about it later, okay?" Kellor said. "Meet you on the square at eight."

That evening the housemaid served me dinner and I ate alone. My parents were important civil servants, and were attending a meeting at the government assembly buildings. Afterwards I left the house and skated towards the square. On the way I passed the tall building in which Ki had her apartment. On impulse, without analysing my motives, I bought some food – bread and harl cheese – from a nearby shop, returned and climbed the steps.

Her door at the end of the corridor was ajar, spilling yellow light. I unfastened my skates and knocked tremulously on the door. After a second or two I heard a faint, "It's open," and cautiously pushed my way inside.

She was seated upon a settee, her leg outstretched, foot resting on a cushioned stool. Her thin lips tightened into an indecipherable line at my appearance, her eyes widen-

ing.

I held up the bread and cheese. "I... I thought you might need something. I brought you these."

She smiled, and the sudden movement of her lips, conferring gratitude, filled me with relief.

"That is so kind of you. Please, put them here." She indicated the cushion beside her.

I could not take my eyes from that portion of her upper body not covered by her white dress, the delicate bone-work of sternum and clavicle.

I realized that it was cold in the room. I would have suffered without my thick coat. That she was happy in this environment brought home to me the fact of her alienness.

"I'm pleased that you came," she said. "I've been lonely here, with no one to talk to."

"Your people – ?"

She laid her head to one side and looked at me. "They do not like to come into the city. There is just one other liaison officer in Ak-helion, but as we work shifts I rarely see him."

"Why did you become a liaison officer?" I asked.

"Because I was curious. I wanted to know whether the stories my people told me about you were true. I wanted to see if you were really as hostile as they claimed."

I wondered if she was mocking me, this young girl who was my age, but much, much older. "And are we?"

"In general, yes," she said, and I fear I blushed in shame. "I have experienced the most unwarranted acts of petty cruelty, bigotry and ignorance during my time in Ak-helion."

I shook my head.

"And then all my assumptions, my conclusions, are thrown into confusion by the random kindness of a total stranger."

I did not know what to say, and so said nothing.

"I am curious," she said. "I want to know why – why are you not like the others? Why did you help me?"

I shook my head, and then blurted words I regretted at once. "Because I think you're beautiful," I said.

Oh, you fool, you young, besotted, inexperienced fool! I cringe when I think about the boy I was, the pain and confusion that filled me then.

But I was honest, I'll grant my young self that. I said what I felt, and to my vast relief the Blue girl did not laugh at me.

She smiled.

She must have been aware of my naivety and pain: she was experienced beyond her age. "That is one of the nicest things anyone has ever said to me, Jen. Thank you."

We talked. It seemed that a tension had been removed from our encounter, and we conversed as friends. She told me of her people, her life in the city far to the north. They were, it seemed, an advanced race – but quite how advanced she refrained from telling me. I tried to question her about the technology of her city, but with a wave of her fingers and a smile she changed the subject.

She was, like me, an only child; and also like me she had experienced no love from or for her parents. She had excelled at school and developed an interest in the peo-

ple who shared her planet; she had studied hard and applied to become a liaison officer, was taken on, trained, and despatched to the city of Ak-helion.

I told her about myself, my parents and friends, my schoolwork and passion for poetry; this last was a painful admission to make – many people might have laughed at my romanticism – but Ki smiled softly and expressed a love of poetry and music, too. I think it was then that I fell in love with her.

An hour passed, then two. It was almost eight. I remembered that I had agreed to meet Kellor and Nani in the square.

I told Ki that I had enjoyed talking to her, but that I had to go.

“Do you? Do you really? Can’t you stay?” She reached out, laid a soft blue hand on mine. To my astonishment I found the touch of her fingers warm, not frost-cold as I had expected.

Her hand moved to my cheek, and drew my head as if by magic towards hers, and her kiss was the consummation of all my dreams.

She stood awkwardly and whispered something. I assisted her to the adjacent room where she undressed me until I stood, naked and shivering like some sacrificial beast. Then she slipped from her simple dress and, amazingly naked, eased me onto the bed and warmed me with her love.

I was surprised, as I grappled inexpertly with the Blue girl, that this should seem so natural. I was fearful at first, afraid of her alienness and difference – but Ki gave me pleasure I had never imagined, and I could not conceive how sex, even with my own kind, could be any better.

Later, I reached out to the bedside table and examined the glowing ball that illuminated the room. It was unlike anything I had every seen, and remarkable, but not half as remarkable as the experience bequeathed me by the alien girl who slept quietly at my side.

I replaced the lambent sphere, dressed without waking her and slipped from the apartment. I made my slow way home through the darkness, filled with a confusion of emotions: love and shame, joy and fear, elation at what I had shared with Ki, and uncertainty as to the future.

I awoke early the following morning and, unable to sleep or face breakfast, left home and skated down the deserted ice-canals. The thought of going to lessons never entered my head; last night had been special to me, had been a turning point, and I needed time in which to digest what had happened. I was drawn to Ki’s apartment, even reached the corner of the boulevard, but stopped myself from going any closer. I wanted to re-acquaint myself with the pleasures of her body, but at the same time I did not want to throw myself at her. Yet, I told myself, if she felt for me what I felt for her, then surely she would be pleased to see me... I was a young boy in love for the first time, and confused. I was by turns elated at the thought of what we had found in each other, and then depressed at how our relationship might be viewed by my elders and so-called betters.

I explored the city three times over until exhausted, and

then found a covered tea-cabin and sat with off-duty ice-trimmers and harl-jockeys as they huddled over steaming pots of spiced milk and traded ribald jokes and jibes. I watched the Star rise high into the sky, surely a little larger than it had been yesterday, and considered the future.

It was a measure of my youthful naïvety that, after just one brief liaison with Ki, I considered myself in love and fearful for that love. In a term or less the ice would melt, daylight would come to Fortune, and the citizens of Ak-helion would migrate below ground. As for the Blues, they would leave their city and trek even further north, to the pole of the planet where they would wait out the fierce heat in the relative cool of their summer city. In four or five terms they would return, and Ki with them. But the thought of waiting four or five terms! I would have left college by then, and entered a profession. I would be an adult, and my parents would be looking to arrange a marriage with a suitable girl. And would Ki even remember me? I laugh to think, now, of the yearning and heartache I suffered that day, with first love still fresh in my heart.

At eight I made my way to the square.

The galactic arms were fiery and spectacular that night. Crowds thronged the ice, staring up at the umber and magenta whorls. Food-vendors and spiced milk sellers were doing a brisk trade. I found Kellor and Nani.

“Why didn’t you meet us last night?” Kellor asked. “And where have you been today?”

Nani was smiling with a warm soft glow that suggested contentment after intimacy.

“I was sick,” I lied. “Must’ve eaten a bad tuber.”

I was torn with the desire to tell them about the night I had spent with Ki, and yet chary of their ridicule. I knew they would be wrong to condemn me; what Ki and I shared was just as precious as anything between Kellor and Nani, but of course they would be unable to see that.

“We’ve decided to go,” Kellor said proudly, as if announcing their betrothal.

I was confused, lost as I was in my own thoughts. “Go where?” I asked, and instantly recalled Kellor’s boast of the day before.

He was nodding at my sudden expression of disbelief. “We made up our minds and we’re going for it.”

I looked to Nani, who yesterday had been as horrified as I.

Kellor had evidently talked her round. She shrugged. “Why not, Jen? If we’re careful... Just think of it, to see the starship before anyone else!”

“But you won’t,” I pointed out, disappointed at her capitulation. “What about all the Church Elders preparing the ceremony, and the guards? They’ll have seen it before you.”

“You know what we mean,” Kellor said. “We’ll see it before anyone else of our age. We’ll be the first.”

“And if you’re caught, what then? Anything might happen. You might be expelled from college, even jailed.”

“We won’t be caught,” Kellor assured me. “We’re young and fit. We can out-skate any feeble Elder.”

“But you don’t even know the way,” I said.

“The High Elders make their way to the ravine every

day,” Kellor said. “We’ll simply follow their tracks through the ice and snow.”

“You’re fools,” I said. “I’ll tell you now, you’ll regret it.”

“So you’re not coming with us?” This was Nani, taunting me.

I merely shook my head and turned away.

“We leave from the square at eight tomorrow evening, if you change your mind and want to join us,” Kellor said. “See you later.” He took Nani’s hand and tugged her off, weaving through the crowd towards her parents’ place.

I skated around the square for a while, wondering who was the more foolish – Kellor and Nani for wanting to satisfy their curiosity ahead of time, or myself for loving a Blue? Perhaps my disdain for their venture was merely envy of their daring, as opposed to the cowardly doubt I felt at my own transgression.

The thought of Ki drove me from the square. I skated at speed across the city, turned down the wide boulevard and slid to a halt outside her building. Ensuring that there was no one about, I removed my skates and carefully climbed the stairs. I pushed through the outer door and knocked on the door of her apartment.

My heart leaped at the sound of her voice. “Who is it?”

“Me. Jen.”

“Jen!” It was a cry. “Well, come in. Don’t just stand there!” And no sooner had I pushed open the door and stepped over the threshold than she limped, wincing at the pain, into my arms.

“But where did you disappear to this morning?” she asked, all concern. “And why didn’t you come earlier?”

I laughed in relief at her welcome. “I had to go home,” I began. “My parents...”

“I missed you, Jen,” she said. “I thought you were never coming back.”

I carried her into the bedroom and lay with her on the bed. We held each other and talked of our respective pasts. I found myself telling her of incidents I thought I had forgotten, found that I had the ability to imbue stories with humour and excitement that had the Blue girl laughing in delight.

In the early hours I climbed from bed, and the movement woke Ki. I kissed her. “I must go. If my parents found out...”

“Tonight,” she whispered. “Come back tonight, Jen. Please.”

I promised, left her and made my way home. I slipped into the house and up to my room without disturbing the mundane sleep of my mother and father. It gave me strength and confidence to know that, for the first time in my life, I was acting without their knowledge or consent.

The following day at college I sat through the lessons in a daze, waiting only for the end of the day so that I could visit Ki. Kellor and Nani were unusually quiet, and it was a while before I recalled what they had planned for tonight.

“You’re fools if you go through with it,” I said at lunch in the vast refectory hall. “Look, in four days it’s the initiation ceremony anyway. Why not just wait?”

But they didn’t even grace my concern with replies, just smiled to themselves and resumed their meal.

At five, rather than leave with them as I usually did, I strapped on my skates and sped away from the college, along the ice-canals towards Ki’s boulevard. I made sure no one was about to see me, then slipped into the building.

She was waiting for me. I lifted her from her feet and hugged her to me, as if I had been away for terms.

Her delighted laugh was the trill of a snowbird.

We made love in her bed and then lay beneath the sheets, holding each other close, and it was this period of our love-making that I preferred; animal passion spent, I lazed in the glow of intimacy with the only person I had ever loved or wholly trusted.

Ki leaned on one elbow, a sheen of sweat coating her face and breasts. She pulled back the blankets to let the air of the room cool her nakedness, while I shivered.

“Tell me about your initiation, Jen,” she said.

I laughed. “That would be like telling you about... I don’t know... the Star,” I said. “How can I tell you about something that I’ve never experienced?”

She pulled a pretty face. “But you must know what happens at the ceremony. Surely your elders have said something?”

“All I know is that on initiation day a hundred of us, maybe more, will be taken to the ravine of the starship.” I realized, as I spoke, that my voice had become hushed, as if with awe.

“The starship,” she said. I would recall, only later, the shadow that passed across her features then.

I nodded. “We enter the ship and the High Elder of the Church of Fortune addresses us. What he says I don’t know. But it’s said that he vouchsafes us the Truth.”

Ki looked at me, dubious. “The Truth? Just like that? Why is it that you’ve never heard the Truth before now?” A smile played upon her lips.

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. “Initiates are sworn to secrecy.”

“Jen,” she said, staring at me seriously with her great black eyes, “will you tell me the Truth when you know it?”

I kissed her high forehead. “Yes, Ki,” I said.

“Promise?”

“Of course I promise.” I looked about the room, at the glow-spheres that not only afforded light, I realized, but also heat. The bedroom was always warmer than the other room, though still cold to my sensibilities.

I picked up a glow-sphere from the bedside table. “I’ve told you what I know about the initiation. Now you tell me about these. I’ve never seen anything like them, Ki.”

She took the ball from me and held it on her open palm; her staring eyes reflected the object. “Aren’t they beautiful? But I’m no scientist, Jen. I don’t know how they work.”

“But you make them – the Blues, I mean?”

“Of course.” She laughed. “Who else?” She frowned at me. “We aren’t the savages you take us for, Jen. Who do you think sold you the invention of steam?”

I shrugged. I had always assumed that it was we who had invented steam power.

“We are a technological race, with many inventions you would never dream of,” Ki said. “In time we will give you

the secret of the glow-spheres, among other things.”

She saw my gaze straying to the window, and the rise of the galaxy betraying the lateness of the hour. She laid a hand on my chest, pressing me to the bed. “Don’t go, Jen. Stay a little longer, please.”

What did it matter if I arrived home now or in three hours, just so long as my parents never discovered my absence? Ki’s pleading was impossible to resist. I pulled the sheets over us, creating a scented darkness, and wrestled her into submission.

Later I considered the ceremony of the initiation, the approach of the Star, and all that this would entail.

“Ki,” I said. I could hardly bring myself to broach the subject. “In one term, when the ice melts...”

She stilled my lips with a finger-tip. “Shhh. Don’t even think about it.”

“I can think of nothing else! I don’t want to lose you.”

“Nor do I want to lose you.”

“Then stay, come with us into the mountain...” But even as I spoke I realized the absurdity of my words.

She smiled sadly. “You know I couldn’t do that, Jen. Your people...” She paused. “In five terms I will be back, Jen. I’ll come for you.”

“But five terms? I’ll go mad just waiting!”

“And so will I, but then we’ll have each other to ease our madness.”

Later, I dressed and tore myself away from Ki, and skated along the deserted ice-canals of Ak-helion in a dismal frame of mind. A torch burned outside my parents’ house, and I wondered if my father or mother intended an early start. I crept into the hall with especial care.

They were waiting for me. They emerged from the front room as I crossed the hall, and stared at me.

“Jen,” my father said, something uncompromising in his tone. I feared they had found out about my relationship with Ki.

“Where have you been?”

“I...” I realized I was stammering. My knees felt weak. My father seemed like a stranger to me at the best of times: now he appeared as a condemning judge. “I’ve been with friends.”

“Who?” he asked, sharply. “Kellor and Nani?”

Something, some inkling of what had happened, made me shake my head. “No. No, someone else —”

“Who?” he asked again, unrelenting.

I stared him in the eye. “A girl,” I said. “I’ve been with a girl I met in a tea-cabin.”

My mother lowered her head and cried quietly. I burned with embarrassment at her knowing that I was no longer her innocent child.

“You’re lying, Jen,” my father said.

“I’m not. It’s true... I’m sorry.”

“You were with Kellor and Nina. Do not deny it!”

I repeated their names. “Why?” I managed at last. “What has happened?”

My father fixed me with a gaze colder than any northern wind. “Tonight Kellor and Nani were arrested by Church Elders close to the ravine of the starship. They are in the most serious trouble. If I find that you were with them...” His tone implied that if I were lying then

he would flay me alive.

“Go to your room.”

I fled. I felt at first relief that my liaison with Ki had not been discovered, and then shame at that relief, and only then solicitude for my friends.

The following morning at breakfast my father did not mention the likely fate of Kellor and Nani, and I could not bring myself to ask; nor did he question me about my affair, for which I was relieved. I suspected that he would try to find out who I was seeing by other means, and I determined to ensure I was never followed to Ki’s apartment.

Before I left the table, my father informed me that for the next term I must be home by seven. I agreed with good grace, secretly mourning the hours I would lose with Ki.

At college that day all talk was about the fate of Kellor and Nani, who were notable by their absence. Classmates took great delight in imagining their punishment, from lengthy incarceration to ten strokes of the lash. I absented myself from all such speculation, sickened. I wondered if, had I not been involved with Ki, I might have weakened and joined my friends on their abortive pilgrimage.

After lessons I made my way to Kellor’s house, but the windows were darkened and my summons went unanswered. Then I crossed the city to Ki’s boulevard, making various detours, and waited on the corner until there was not a soul in sight. I stayed with her until just before seven, and returned to share the evening meal with my parents like a dutiful son.

For the next three days, before the ceremony at the starship, I visited Ki immediately after lessons, my few hours with her at these times all the more precious for being stolen and curtailed.

At college, on the day before the ceremony, an atmosphere of anticipation and excitement filled the cloisters and classrooms. The continued absence of Kellor and Nani dampened my sense of expectation, and at lunchtime in the refectory my worst fears were confirmed.

A small boy, whose father was a High Elder in the Church of Fortune, approached my table, “Are you Jen, a friend of Kellor and Nani?”

“What of it?”

“Their case is being heard today,” he said with inflated self-importance. “If found guilty, their initiation will be set back six terms.”

I stared at him in shock, unable to reply. The rest of the day passed in a blur, and at five I fled across the city to Ki.

Another shock awaited me at her apartment. I knocked on the door and entered. She called to me from the bedroom. I looked about the outer room, sure that something had changed. It was some seconds before I noticed that various items, glow-spheres and paintings, were missing.

When I stepped into her bedroom I saw that she was packing. She stood gingerly on her damaged ankle, placing wrapped objects in crates.

“Ki...?”

She limped across the room and took me in her arms.

"Jen... Oh, Jen. We've been recalled. The liaison officers. The time has come for the migration north. I leave Ak-helion in three days."

"Three days?" I repeated like an idiot, disbelieving. I shook my head. "In three days you'll be gone?"

The concept was too vast and terrible to imagine.

She stared into my eyes, brushing hair from my forehead. "We have three days," she whispered. "I'll make them special, Jen, so that you'll remember me until I return."

I broke down and wept, then, like the young boy I was. She held me in her arms and tried to console me, with the care and concern of the woman she was.

I stayed with her throughout the night, regardless of my father's curfew. Damn him, I thought. I would not let him deny me precious hours with the girl I loved, no matter what the consequences. At dawn, as the Star rose in the dark sky, I made my way home and defiantly joined my parents at breakfast. That morning, the day of the ceremony, we ate in strained silence and they elected not to reprimand me for ignoring the curfew.

It seemed that the entire population of Ak-helion was gathered on the city wall to wish us on our way. Escorted by the Elders of the Church, we set off in a torch-lit procession along the downward path cut through the ice. The cheers of the crowd ringing in my ears, I looked round the bright, expectant faces for any sign of Kellor and Nani, but saw neither.

We left the city behind us and entered territory new to me, vast sloping fields of snow, gullies sliced through slabs of ice washed orange in the torchlight. All around us were signs of the thaw: from overhangs and lips of ice, water poured in muscled, quicksilver torrents. We seemed to trek for miles through this eerie, flame-lit landscape, our thoughts on the forthcoming initiation. For all my sorrow at my friends' absence, even so I was more concerned with what might lie ahead.

Perhaps an hour later I made out, in the distance, the rosy glow of massed torches emanating from a hollow in the ground. We approached, and as we did so the robed Church Elders in our midst began a dolorous chant. My heart set up a laboured pounding.

We neared the lip of the ravine and stared down, and I saw first the sweeping flight of steps cut into the ice, and then the starship itself.

I had had no idea what to expect. The reproduction of pictures and icons representing the ship was prohibited by the Church, and from stray comments and hints dropped by adults I had in mind that the starship might resemble a tall stalagmite of ice, an edifice of silver metal reaching for the stars.

I stopped in my tracks and gazed in slack-jawed amazement. Silver it was indeed, and tall, but I would never have guessed how silver, or how tall. It coruscated like diamond and was fully five times as high as the highest building in Ak-helion. Set into its towering, triangular length were a hundred observation nacelles and viewports, alternating with vast numerals and decals excoeriated by its journey through the gulf of space. Seeing the reality of the ship for the very first time, I was filled with

heart-breaking pride at the achievements of my race, at the feat of survival represented by this rearing leviathan.

Gasps and cries of wonder broke out all around me as we naïve initiates stared, but no sooner had we feasted our eyes than we were being hurried down the ice steps by the Church Elders. As we dropped into the ravine, so the starship seemed to gain height. Soon we had to crane our necks to make out the antennae bristling at its very pinnacle.

At the foot of the stairway, before the great arched entrance of the ship, we halted. There was a commotion among our group as initiates turned and stared. I felt elation swell within me at what I saw then. Climbing down the steps after us, escorted by two stern-faced Elders, were Kellor and Nani.

I made my way back through the throng and embraced my friends under the disapproving gazes of the Elders.

"What happened?" I gasped.

"We were reprimanded," Kellor said. "That's all – just reprimanded!" He and Nani seemed dazed at the fact of their reprieve, shocked as we all were at the sight of the starship.

We were called to order by the Church High Elder, resplendent in his silver robes, and ushered into the hold of the ship.

There we stood like the worshippers we were, in this ultra-modern cathedral, while the High Elder climbed onto a podium before us and gave his speech.

I only heard fragments of what he said. It was much as Kellor had forecast: an exhortation to us, the new men and women of Ak-helion and the future of our race, to abide by established principles and prove ourselves worthy citizens.

I was disappointed that an experience of such grandeur should end like this.

"We of Ak-helion represent a proud and noble race, my friends. Through the void of space our kind came in search of new, habitable planets, came from worlds more hospitable than ours, found Fortune, and settled. We overcame hardship, intemperate seasons and hostile climes, to survive, and not only survive, but flourish. And yet..." the words rang out above our heads as he paused to stare at each one of us in turn, "and yet our ancestors had much to overcome, initially."

He paused again, and Nani found my hand and gripped. Involuntarily I reached out and clasped Kellor's hand. "This is it," I said. "The Truth."

"When our forbears made landfall in the starship," intoned the High Elder, "we were met with the opposition of not only the harsh seasons, the fire of summer and the ice of winter, but a more stern and uncompromising foe..."

He went on, and I heard his words, but so benumbed was my brain by the enormity of his address that I could take in barely half of what he said. "And before our ancestors could establish contact to assure them of our peaceful intentions, they attacked. They were primitive by our standards, but they had the element of surprise and vast forces, and we almost succumbed. We lost many a colonist during that first terrible week, many specialist and scientist who would have made our existence on

Fortune that much less hazardous..."

Nausea swelled in my belly, sickening me.

"That is why," he was saying, "our relations with the natives are limited and strictly controlled. How can we trust a race who once – millennia ago, granted – did its very best to annihilate our innocent ancestors?" The High Elder stared straight at us and asked, "How can we bring ourselves to trust the Blues?"

I felt dizzy. My pulse pounded in my ears. The High Elder spoke next of an oath of silence, and allegiance to the Church. One by one we moved to the front of the gathering, knelt and received his blessing, his hand upon our heads, and repeated the oath.

Then we found ourselves outside the ship, and filing away from the hallowed vessel, up the steps towards the city that was home, but which would never again be quite the same. I recall little of the return journey, save Kellor by my side, tears streaming down his face as he cursed the Blue-skinned barbarians of this planet. Those were his exact words, and I could tell from the reaction of the group that they shared his sentiments. Our initiation had achieved its aim: never again would we look upon a Blue in quite the same light.

Except... I loved Ki, and knew her for a caring, compassionate being.

There was a banquet thrown for the initiates at the college, to which families and friends were invited. I went through the motions of eating the lavish meal, listening to rousing speeches by government officials and Church Elders. It was as if we had been made one by the events of the initiation, that we were unified against adversity and future hardship – except that I felt truly apart and isolated. I listened to Kellor and Nani chatter about the bravery of our intrepid ancestors, and could take no more. At the first opportunity I excused myself from the company of my parents and friends, ostensibly going outside for fresh air, and then made my escape. In the cloak-room I found my skates and raced from the college building, across the city to Ki.

She was sitting alone, surrounded by packed crates and boxes, when I pushed into the room. She looked so forlorn, and I saw that she had been crying.

She stood and limped into my arms. "Jen," she said. "I have been thinking – considering our situation. Why don't you..." she paused, staring at me seriously, "why don't you come with me, to the city at the pole, and wait out summer there? It would be possible."

Something in my expression stopped her words. Go with her, I thought, go with her and live among the people who had once attacked my ancestors? How might I be received, a descendant of the invaders?

"Jen? Jen, what's wrong?"

I stared at her. Did she know? Was she aware of the events of the past that had so irrevocably divided our people?

"You don't know, do you?" I said. "They never told you."

She stared, wide-eyed. "Jen?"

I took a breath. "Today was the ceremony of initiation," I said. "Today I learned the Truth. I promised that I'd tell

you..."

She raised a hand and touched my cheek. "Tell me what?" she asked in a small voice.

"Tell you what happened when we arrived on Fortune," I said, "what happened to our ancestors."

I recounted the events of the ceremony, what the High Elder told us about what had occurred all those terms ago. I was objective in my account of the initiation, showing her that, whatever might have happened in the past, I did not agree with the Church's chauvinistic reinforcement of enmity and xenophobia.

When I finished I looked into her eyes. "So how could I go with you, Ki – how would your people accept me?"

An expression of infinite pity filled her eyes, as she softly kissed my lips, then drew away and shook her head.

"Oh, Jen," she said. "Oh, my love, can't you see...?"

I stared at her, taken aback. "What?"

"Jen, please listen to me." She pushed me onto the settee, sat down by my side. "This might be hard for you to accept, but please believe me. I wouldn't lie to you – you know that. I love you, and I would not tell you one single untruth." She took my face between her palms and said, "Jen, please believe me when I say that you, your people, did not arrive on Fortune aboard the starship."

I stared at her. It came to me, then, with sudden insight.

Why had I been so blind? The glow-spheres, Ki's talk of superior technology... It was not we who had travelled through space aboard the ship, but the Blues.

Then I wondered if it might have been *we* who had attacked the space-faring Blues...

Later, to atone for our collective guilt and to maintain the status quo of life in Ak-helion, had the Church had initiated the lie of the initiation ceremony?

"You..." I said. "You came here aboard the starship?"

She stared at me, as if pitying my ignorance.

"Jen," she said, sadly. "Jen, both our races are native to this planet. We both evolved here."

I shook my head, confused. "But the ship," I cried. "It's out there. I saw it. If we didn't come in the ship, then who did?" I stopped.

"Who else?" she asked. "A third race, who call themselves Humans. It was they who came to Fortune aboard the starship."

My mind was reeling. "Humans?" I whispered. "But... but I always thought that we, that my people..."

She was shaking her head.

"How do you know this?" I asked in a feeble whisper. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because my people are sworn to secrecy – we cannot tell you the truth of the past for fear of rekindling old enmities. Before the arrival of the starship, you people of the south were at war with us. You were a terrible warrior race..." She paused, then went on. "Then the Humans arrived. Their ship was failing and they had to make a forced landing – they would never have chosen to settle on Fortune if not for the failure of their ship's guidance systems. And then, Jen, your people attacked. You killed many of the Humans. Only six survived. We rescued them, took them to the sanctuary of our city in the north. How do you think we gained the knowledge to

develop the technology we now possess? It was the Humans, Jen, who gave us that knowledge."

I sat in silence for a long time. At last I said. "But how can you be sure, Ki? How can you *know* for certain? I mean, it's all so confusing, it all happened so long ago – how can anyone be sure?"

She was watching me with compassion. "Because, in our northern city, two Humans still live with us."

"No!" I exclaimed. "That isn't possible! The starship landed millennia ago. How could they have survived?"

She took my hand. "Jen, they live much longer than we do. They live for thousands of terms. They live with us now, as free citizens, in the north." She paused, squeezing my hand. "Jen, listen to me – you cannot stay here in this city of lies and repression. A steam-wagon leaves in three hours. Come with me and learn the truth, Jen. Come with me to the north and meet the Humans for yourself."

I left Ki then, telling her that I needed time in which to think. I skated to the city wall and sat staring into the dark sky, at the Star growing in luminosity hour by hour. I considered the initiation ceremony, the terrible lie I had learned there.

I thought of the summer that was coming to Fortune, the claustrophobic interment that my people would be forced to undergo to escape the merciless heat of the sun. I thought of Kellor and Nani, good people diminished by conditioned ignorance.

As the Star set slowly in the east, I left the city wall and made my way to where the steam-wagon was waiting in the boulevard.

Ki was standing beside its huge front wheel, her back to me, looking nervously along the street towards my parents' house.

"Ki," I said.

She turned with speed and fear, and stared at me. I saw that she had been crying. She opened her mouth to speak, but words would not come.

At last she managed, "Jen? Have you...? Will you come with me?"

Until I heard those words, the desperation in her voice, I had been undecided. Or perhaps a part of me had known what I might do all along, but had been too fearful to acknowledge the fact.

To live so long in ignorance, and then to learn the truth, can be a terrible revelation.

Slowly, without a word, I reached out and took her hand. Then we boarded the steam-wagon and began the long journey north to the polar city of the Blues.

Eric Brown was winner of last year's *Interzone* story poll, for his "Hunting the Starque" (issue 141). His most recent books are a novel, *New York Nights* (Gollancz, 2000), and a short-story collection in collaboration with Keith Brooke, *Parallax View* (Sarob Press, 2000). He lives in Haworth, West Yorkshire.

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Robert A. Heinlein's 2001: A Space Odyssey

Gary Westfahl

As we enter the year 2001 – the true beginning of the third millennium – a natural topic for discussion would be the landmark film and novel *2001: A Space Odyssey*, perhaps drawing a contrast between Arthur C. Clarke's glorious predictions about 2001 and the dismal reality of the actual 2001. And, if I read my e-mail correctly, editor David Pringle is suggesting that I provide exactly such a discussion.

Unfortunately, I strive to avoid the obvious, and Clarke's world of 2001 is a topic that has already been discussed many times, and hence a topic that is unlikely to inspire striking new insights. So, with David's indulgence, I will address an entirely different question: what did Robert A. Heinlein, the other giant of 20th-century science fiction, have to say about the year 2001, and what lessons lie in his vision? The question will launch a journey with a modest beginning, standing on a ledge with a kitten, but will later take us back to Clarke and even to the start of the fourth millennium in 3001.

If you examine the chart of Heinlein's Future History, once a standard feature of his books, you find precisely one story that occurred around the year 2001: "Ordeal in Space," originally published in *Town and Country* in 1948. It is one of the most obscure Heinlein stories, rarely discussed or even mentioned in the critical literature; even Alexei Panshin's *Heinlein in Dimension* and H. Bruce Franklin's *Robert A. Heinlein: America as Science Fiction*, which undertake to analyze all

of Heinlein's novels and stories, simply summarize the story in one paragraph virtually without comment. To the extent that "Ordeal in Space" is known at all, it is thought of only as one of the sloppily sentimental stories that Heinlein cynically peddled to the slick magazines after World War II, most of them later republished in the collection *The Green Hills of Earth*.

Yet, when I finished rereading it, I sensed that this may have been a story with special meaning for its author. For one thing, its central plot device is the rescue of a kitten, and reverence for cats is an absolutely central aspect of Heinlein's world view, expressed most vividly in his masterpiece *The Door into Summer*. Second, when protagonist Bill Cole adopts a pseudonym, he chooses the name "William Saunders" – but Saunders is also a pseudonym that Heinlein chose for himself, first publishing his 1941 story "Elsewhen" under the name "Caleb Saunders."

Looking at its plot, one does detect autobiographical resonances. Space-man Cole ventures out onto the surface of his rotating spaceship to replace a broken radar antenna that must function properly for the ship to land safely. Unable to reach his lifeline, he finds himself clinging to a handhold on the spaceship, gazing down into the endless depths of deep space for over two hours, until he finally loses his grip and falls into the abyss. Even though another spaceship saves him, he develops a severe case of acrophobia that requires him to quit space travel and take a menial job in New York under an

assumed name, scrupulously avoiding all exposure to heights. Then one night, staying in a friend's apartment on the 35th floor, he hears a kitten howling on a ledge four feet below a window. Fighting off his fear of heights, he drops down onto the ledge and inches over to retrieve the kitten and carry it back to the apartment. Recognizing that he has finally conquered his acrophobia, he resolves to return to space and take the kitten along as his companion.

In Heinlein's own case, he was first obliged to retire from a promising career in the Navy because he contracted tuberculosis; he spent several years trying his hand at various professions with little success; but when he finally turned to writing science fiction, he instantly became one of the field's most popular authors. Then, after World War II began, Heinlein went back to work for the Navy, albeit as a "civilian engineer," Franklin reports, working "in the designing and testing of materials associated with naval aviation." Having contributed to the Navy once again, and having established himself in a field that allowed him to vicariously experience military service through the heroes of his space novels, Heinlein may well have felt that, by means of grit and determination, he had effectively returned to the military career he had once been forced to abandon. From this perspective, Cole's triumph was not unlike Heinlein's own triumph.

But one trivializes "Ordeal in Space" by seeing it purely as a veiled autobiographical sketch, for it is also very

much a story about the cold realities of outer space. In an era when science fiction sought to domesticate and familiarize space – an impulse still observed today in countless novels, the *Star Trek* series, and *Star Wars* films – Heinlein recognized and frankly emphasized the vastness and terror of space. When Cole is about to complete his repair job,

The wrench slipped as he finished tightening the bolt; it slipped from his grasp, fell free. He watched it go, out and out and out, down and down and down, until it was so small he could no longer see it. It made him dizzy to watch it, bright in the sunlight against the deep black of space.

Then, when he lost his lifeline and found himself clinging to the handhold,

He looked down – and regretted it.

There was nothing below him but stars, down and down, endlessly. Stars, swinging past as the ship spun with him, emptiness of all time and blackness and cold.

This is not the sort of language one normally associates with Heinlein; but he is unusually striving for effect, if not with total success, striving to communicate just how huge, how hostile, how inhuman the depths of space would seem to a single, vulnerable man in a spacesuit.

If this part of the story did not impress the readers of *Town and Country* magazine, it did impress Heinlein – because, two years later, he told the same story all over again.

The project began when a famous film-maker approached a famous science fiction writer and asked him to collaborate in creating the world's greatest science fiction film. The author chooses one of his stories for the film, radically revises it, and tosses in a vignette from another one of his stories. You may think that I am talking about Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke and how they transformed Clarke's "The Sentinel" into *2001: A Space Odyssey*, including the sequence from Clarke's "The Other Side of the Sky" when an astronaut is briefly exposed to the vacuum of space. But I am actually talking about George Pal and Robert A. Heinlein and how they transformed Heinlein's *Rocket Ship Galileo* into *Destination Moon*, including – as I now realize – a sequence from Heinlein's "Ordeal in Space."

For, on their way to the moon, Heinlein's astronauts encounter the same problem that Cole faced – a broken radar antenna that must be fixed by venturing out onto the surface of the spaceship. What follows, as I argue elsewhere, is one of the most memorable scenes in the cinema of space travel, a powerful illustration of the

vastness and strangeness of outer space. First, the men put on their space helmets; pushing a button, one man watches as the light comes on to announce "vacuum"; then the airlock door slowly opens to reveal the starry blackness of space. Next, the camera shows the men emerging from the spacecraft *upside down*, a visual reminder that in space there is no "up" and "down" in the standard sense; and, still upside down from the audience's perspective, the three men pause to stare at the awesome immensity of space. Proceeding to work, they walk on magnetized shoes around the hull of the spaceship, gradually vanishing from view as they walk past the ship's "horizon." At this point, one astronaut bends over, his feet are no longer in contact with the spaceship hull, and he drifts into the vastness of space, just like Cole; but he doesn't go far and is quickly retrieved by an astronaut wielding an oxygen tank as a miniature rocket.

While *Destination Moon* does represent Heinlein's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, it is unquestionably a film that lacks Clarke's cosmic perspective and mythic resonances; but Heinlein valued space more as a new arena for fulfilling human activity than as a way to encounter the alien and ponder the mysteries of creation. Still, he shared with Clarke the realization that outer space represented both an awe-inspiring and a dismayingly dangerous new home for humanity, and he harkened back to "Ordeal in Space" to convey that chilling lesson. Later, Clarke himself would do the same thing.

Reading about "Ordeal in Space" and *Destination Moon*, you might be thinking, "An astronaut goes outside his spacecraft to fix a broken antenna? Where have I seen that before?" Or perhaps you have already hit upon the answer: in *2001: A Space Odyssey* itself – because, in one of that film's several references to *Destination Moon*, it is HAL's claim of a fault in the spaceship *Discovery's* antenna system that forces Frank Poole to make two trips into space to deal with the problem. Further, on his second trip, the maniacal HAL murders Poole and sends him hurtling into the abyss of space, visualizing Cole's fearful plight far more dramatically than *Destination Moon*. And while this homicide may seem quite unlike the accidents that befell Cole and the astronaut of *Destination Moon*, one might recall that HAL became deranged in the first place due to flawed programming, so his assault on Poole was in fact an "accident" of sorts.

The trouble with this scene, in contrast with its predecessors, is that it does not end the way we would wish, with Poole's rescue and recovery.

Instead, although Bowman tries to save him, he sees that he is already dead, abandons the body to drift endlessly through space, and returns to the task of overcoming HAL. Perhaps Clarke was troubled by this downbeat turn of events, because he returned to this scene 30 years later and finished the story properly, in his final *2001* novel *3001: The Final Odyssey*. Here, a thousand years after the original story took place, Poole's body is finally recovered and, with the advanced medical techniques of the era, he is restored to life. Even though, like Cole, he takes a while to recover from the experience, Poole is soon back on his feet and ready for heroism again, as he takes the lead in combatting the now-malevolent alien monoliths. So, it took him rather a long time, but Clarke, like Heinlein, eventually transformed this experience into an inspirational tale of rescue and redemption.

So, what are we to make of this seemingly inconsequential vignette that resonates through the careers of the 20th century's greatest science fiction writers? The broken radar antenna conveys how dependent an astronaut will be on advanced technology to navigate through this new ocean; the astronaut's plunge into the depths of space conveys how helpless he may seem in venturing into this strange new environment; and the astronaut's rescue and return to space conveys how humans will nevertheless be able to adjust to and deal with the dangers and mysteries of space. It is a hopeful message, but not a naïve one, as it fully recognizes the many difficulties in the exploration of space, as well as the time and effort that may be required to accomplish the task.

Recognizing this theme in their work, we can defend Heinlein and Clarke against the charge most frequently brought against them: that they were wildly over-optimistic in predicting that humans would be travelling through and colonizing the Solar System by the year 2001. Yes, they did say that conquering space would happen much more quickly than it has, but they never said conquering space would be easy. While they surely found it disappointing to see things progress so slowly, their understanding of the daunting challenges involved surely made this turn of events not entirely unexpected. In response, however, both men would urge humans to stay the course and keep struggling to overcome both the technical problems of space and their own fears. And, in defiance of all logic, it is a message that some may still find inspirational as they confront the dishearteningly earthbound existence of 2001.

Gary Westfahl



REVIEWED

The Truthful Reviewer

Chris Gilmore

Rarely can the truthful reviewer recount a once-in-a-lifetime experience, yet this month I can. It goes like this. The endpapers of Walter Moers's *The 13½ Lives of Captain Bluebear* (Secker & Warburg, £18) present maps. The front shows the island continent of Zamonía, where the later action takes place; it's standard stuff, reminiscent of the Discworld, and not that well drawn or printed. The back shows the world of which Zamonía is a part; I took one look and burst out laughing. I had never before laughed at a map, and am unlikely to again, so there you are.

The text (based on a German cartoon), is a highly picaresque series of tall stories, told in the first person by Bluebear, a Candide/Simplificissimus figure who drifts or is propelled hither and yon through the world as depicted. Some of the stories are a bit too tall, even for me. While I can credit Bluebear's claim to have invented the Happy Ending (despite a strong claim by the late Miss Prism), no way did he invent the pizza calzoni. That was created extempore by Poco Rallentando, commis chef of Bedford's famous Pizzeria Salmonella, in outrage at my description of what makes a Cornish pastie. There's an apt epigraph from Raspe's *Baron Munchausen*, and it's frequently punctuated by extracts from the *Encyclopedia of Marvels, Life Forms and Other Phenomena of Zamonía and its Environs* by Professor Abdullah Nightingale, in much the same spirit as the extracts from the eponymous *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* pepper the five-part trilogy – admirers of Pratchett and

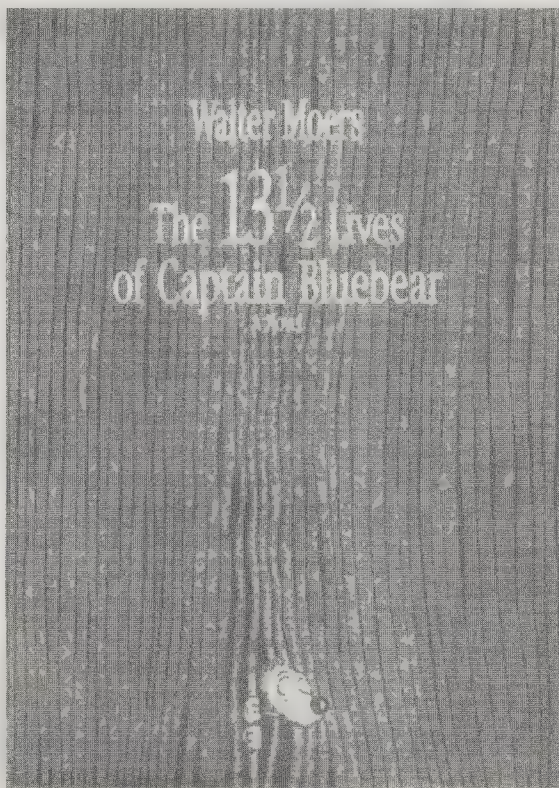
Adams take note.

Such admirers tend either to be young, or to have been young when those books were new. Doubtless Bluebear will gather his own coterie; I, meeting him for the first time in my middle age, have a few reservations. First, Moers is a far better yarn-spinner than draughtsman. His map is wonderful, but it's a flat map, and the same flatness pervades his drawings. There's no sense of a third dimension, and precious little character or wit – Bluebear, with his pointy head, doesn't look at all like a bear; rather,

he resembles a lumpen, ill-tempered dog. Second, while the great majority of Moers's jokes are wonderfully fresh, he includes some makeweight chestnuts of dreary weakness. It is really not a good idea to name even a minor character "Qwerty Uiop," nor will you amuse an audience of any sophistication by writing backwards. In this, Moers reminds me of the best and the worst of Lewis Carroll.

Nor are the publishers guiltless: the book is divided (predictably) into a foreword and 13½ chapters, each of which the author has gone to the trouble of naming, but there's no contents page (I've complained about this before, and will go on doing so until publishers become a bit less slovenly). Finally, the designer has been positively perverse: the paragraphs are not indented, and where queries ought to appear a nameless abortion has been substituted. The author deserves better than to have his book marred in this drear fashion.

But these are minor blemishes; what matters is that John Brownjohn's translation is well-nigh faultless. I would never have guessed that this book had not been composed in English. The only points where I think he may have let himself down are those where Bluebear appears to forget his species and refer to himself as "a man of means" etc. I suspect Brownjohn has taken the closest English equivalent to a German idiom, but I may be wrong, and it's of small moment. This is definitely one to buy and keep – in hardback; paperbacks don't have endpapers.



I have occasionally complained that this or that Robert Rankin book hasn't been to full strength; by contrast, *Waiting for Godalming* (Doubleday, £16.99) is over-strength, and suffers somewhat thereby. It's written as two parallel stories, one in first person, one in third, which appear to have nothing much to do with each other until well over halfway through, when they merge. Both are based, as Rankin obligingly tells us, on literary clichés. The first-person is yet another 1950s private-eye spoof, the principal target being Mike Hammer, though there are echoes of Damon Runyon; the third-person is the story of the petty crook who steals something of great significance to a crook on the dizziest plateau of delinquency.

Both plots allow for a large number of literary running jokes, not to mention those that permeate Rankin's entire oeuvre, and this is the main problem; Lazlo Woodbine, the private eye hired to investigate the disappearance and presumed murder of God, insists on being fan-

tastically witty and alliterative at all possible points, and dragging in references to his trenchcoat, fedora and trusty Smith and Westclox (actually I made this one up, but they're all like that, and all different), regardless of relevance. In retaliation, no one who meets him ever gets his name right, though they, too, always start with a W; and they occasionally bop him one on the noggin, whereupon he invariably descends into a "deep dark whirling pit of oblivion."

The effect of triple-distilled Rankin is cumulative, but Woodbine's first encounter with his employer will give a hint of the flavour:

I've met some ugly fat dames in my time, but this one took the dog biscuit. She made Mo Mowlam look like Madonna. I didn't figure this dame looked good for anything but using as a roadblock in Belfast. But always being the gent I am, I gave her the big hello.

'Hi, babe,' I said, suave as Sinatra. 'Did the circus leave town without you?'

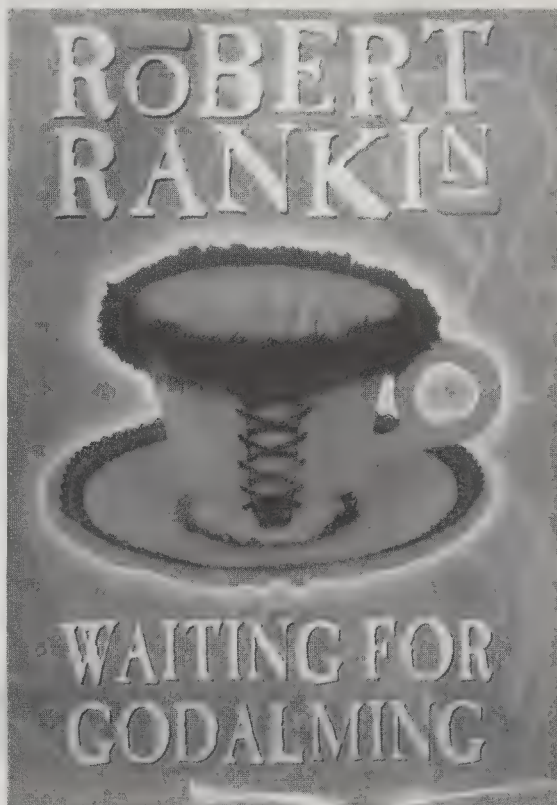
She shot me a glance like she was chewing on a stewed chihuahua and moved more chins than Chairman Mao on his glorious march to the south.

This sort of thing is fine now and again, and Rankin does it well, but stop on page of it is wearing.

The passages relating to Icarus Smith, the sneak-thief (or relocater, as he prefers to put it) who obtains supplies of a drug which permits mere mortals to detect the angels and devils passing incognito among them, are somewhat quieter, though not without cross-talk – helpful in padding what is essentially a very thin story.

I should add that, though thin, its construction conforms to the conventions of the '50s thrillers it apes, and I enjoyed it enormously – in small but frequent doses. The only time Rankin drops below form is when Smith and Woodbine (geddit?) meet. It becomes immediately apparent that they inhabit different and incompatible realities – which is fine, but Rankin belabours the point. Altogether, not classic Rankin, and not for the beginner, but great fun for the enthusiast.

At the opposite pole of fantasy, Caroline Stevermer's *When the King Comes Home* (Tor, \$22.95) is a short but serious piece of work, though it ultimately fails. Unlike much current fantasy, it's set in an uncompromisingly (but not religiously) Christian context. The kingdom of Lidia is one of those small European countries,



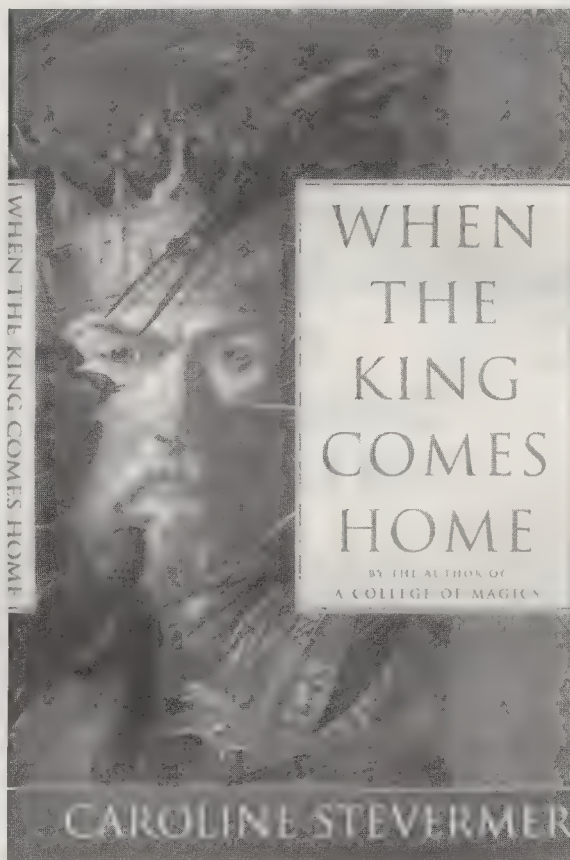
like Rhaetia or Western Roumelia, which ought to have existed somewhere, sometime, but can't be found on any map, and the story is told in the first person by Hail Rosamer, a girl from a rich peasant family. Hail is lucky to have her artistic talent spotted early, and get apprenticed to a (female) master in the capital.

This allows the first part of the book to concentrate on process-writing, and a *Bildungsroman* very much in the style of Ursula Le Guin. Consequently, though there's very little real action in the early chapters, one hardly notices; both aspects are expertly handled, and Stevermer drops some teasing hints that though both Hail and Lidia will survive, the kingdom is set for decline. Stevermer shares with Robertson Davies the ability to communicate what appear to be the closely guarded secrets of recondite arts, so that her account of Hail's apprenticeship reeks of authenticity. It's not so much that one believes that any particular atelier of the high baroque was run on the lines described, but that one could have been so run.

The story itself concerns Hail's involvement with the machinations of the evil witch Dalet, who has summoned back to life a great and good king of Lidia, plus his champion and his queen. Together with her henchman, a robber baron called Red Ned, she hopes to manipulate all three to her own advantage, though exactly what she expects to gain is left unclear – and indeed, Dalet's weakness as a character is the book's principal defect. She rarely appears in person, and dies in a most unsatisfying manner: shot dead from behind at close range by a minor character whom she's failed to notice. As for Red Ned, he never appears at all, even dying off-stage.

Also dissatisfying is Stevermer's relentless refusal to allow her heroine any overt sexuality. A young woman, healthy in mind and body, neither stupid nor vicious, ought to be attractive to everyone, with drama hinging on the nature and extent of the attraction. This in not the case with Hail, who is variously regarded as an enemy, a comrade and a resource yet never, by anyone, as an object of desire; something neither Stevermer nor she seems to regret, as Hail herself is not credited with the least feeling for any of the handsome and vivid men with whom she has dealings. She dies (one presumes) a virgin, at the end of a long, successful career devoted to practising and imparting her art.

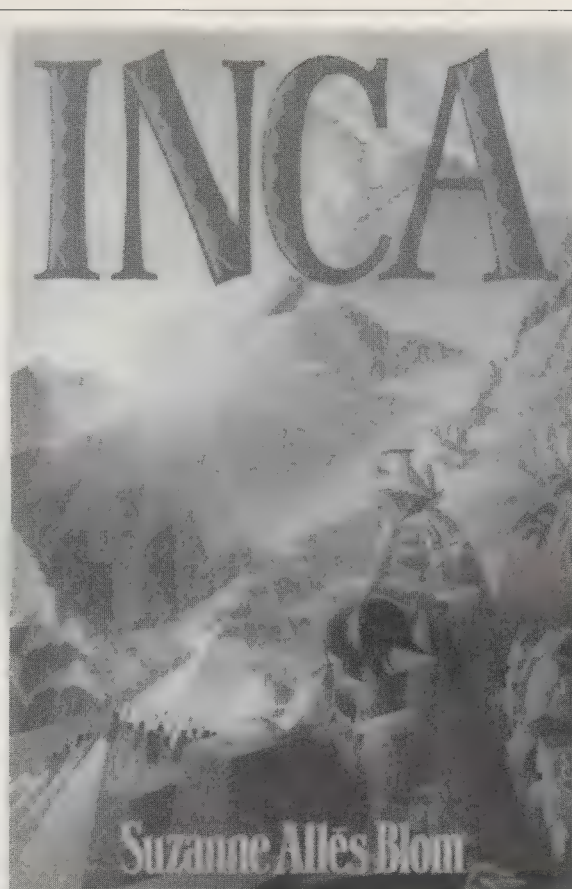
Aho! A few such unfortunates are born into every generation, and I daresay they include some big achievers. Immanuel Kant is supposed to have been one, Shaw claimed to be, and similar claims have been laid on behalf of C.S. Lewis and Florence Nightingale. As Stevermer is far too clever not to know what she's doing, I strongly suspect her of being a pro-



ponent of the New Chastity, and her book of being covert propaganda therefor. Whether or not, it ain't art; its lack of tension condemns it. I begrudge neither their presumed contentment, but who would prefer the biographies of Sir Cliff Richard or Sir Edward Heath to those of such tortured souls as Sir Isaac Newton or Sir James Barrie? This book presents the unhappy combination of consistently excellent writing applied to a hopelessly weak end.

The activities of the conquistadors in Central and South America must rank high in the roll of what we now call "crimes against humanity." The choice offered Atahualpa, to be baptized and promptly garroted by his fellow Christians, or to be burned to death as a heathen, is but a point of high grotesquerie in a saga of what Hannah Arendt would later call "the banality of evil"; understandably, WASP aficionados of collective guilt still wallow in it. Yet there's another side to the story. As the *National Geographic* has recently been at pains to remind us, the Inca religion sacramentalized a most distressing form of child-murder, and centralized it to Inca spiritual life. Not to have suppressed that religion, but instead equipped the imperium that served it with gunpowder, steel-technology and the spoked wheel, would have been a crime incomparably more heinous. Looking at Latin America today we may deplore the means, but cannot entirely condemn the end.

It is failure to take advantage of this tension that fatally weakens



Suzanne Allés Blom's *Inca: The Scarlet Fringe* (Forge, \$24.95). It's an almost pure alternate history, the only hint of the supernatural being dreams wherein the dead appear to the living. Here, Atahualpa (whom Blom clumsily calls "Exemplary Fortune," repeating the mistake Gene Wolfe made in *Soldier of the Mist*) is not so fatally in the wrong place at the wrong time, but instead accepts banishment to a provincial governorship.

He is accompanied into exile by a captured Spanish thug whom the Incas have optimistically named "Tamed Ocelot." Atahualpa, who has the qualities of the ideal fast-track civil servant, sets about picking TO's brains for Spanish fighting techniques, and to some extent humanizes him – mainly by finding him an Indian wife with a healthy sex-drive.

This works because Indians are good, you see. Granted, they haruspicate by means of llama entrails, but little children? They love them – chastely (which is more than can be said for Pizarro, who kidnaps a boy, forcibly baptizes him, and uses him as a catamite by land and sea). The contrast is deftly made, but depends for its effect on the reader being ignorant of the most notorious aspects of Inca culture. A pity, because though Blom has evidently read deeply and writes well, she has chosen to sanitize her story. In times of pestilence and crisis, people turn to religion, and their religion was one of horror and betrayal. Had she chosen to present the feelings of (say) a couple whose beloved child had been selected to become an "honoured messenger to the gods," by means of a sacrifice in which they were expected to take part, I'm sure she could have made a very good job. As it is... this book is entirely too partisan. It's also the start of an open-ended series, but I don't propose to read further, good though the writing is. I wouldn't read the apologetics of snuff-movie makers, either. Yeah, dead prejudiced, that's me.

Chris Gilmore

Over the last couple of years, the storylines of the BBC-published Doctor Who books have become absurdly convoluted and interdependent – "too far up themselves" as a letter writer to *Doctor Who Magazine* perceptively put it. But last summer series editor Justin Richards responded by starting the range of Eighth Doctor Adventures afresh. His own novel, *The Burning* (BBC, £5.99), sees Paul McGann's Doctor deposited in England at the end of the 19th century, alone, with nothing except his clothes and an inert blue box, and no memory of any of his past adventures. The message is a clear "welcome aboard" to new readers with little or no knowledge of *Doctor Who*.

Casualties of War by Steve Emmerson (BBC, £5.99) is set at the end of the First World War. The Doctor is still stranded on Earth and the box that is obviously his TARDIS is still inert. Sadly, this book is utter rubbish; the prose is vague and meandering, the characters do not behave as if they've

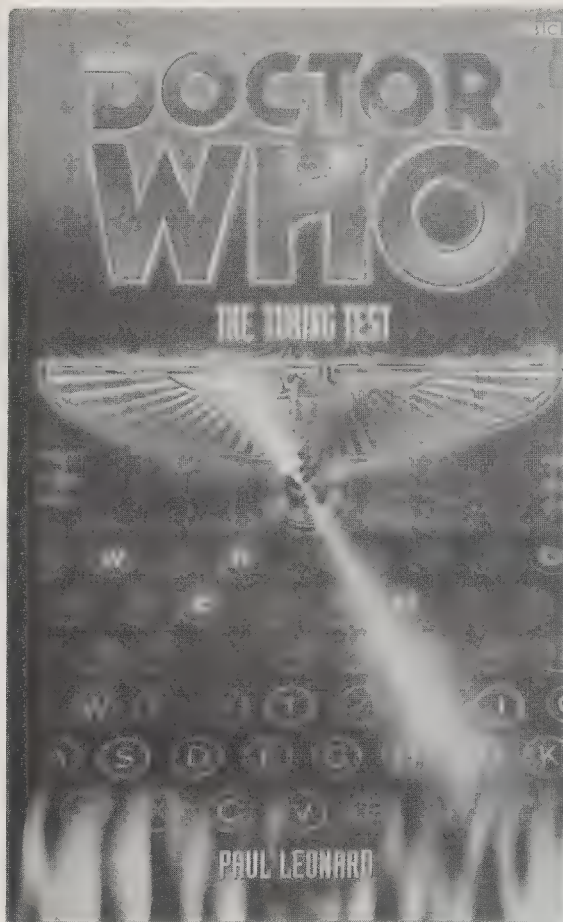
The Doctor Who Fell to Earth

Paul Beardsley

just encountered homicidal walking corpses, and we never find out what the villain really wants, or how the

Doctor manages to defeat him – the final showdown takes place off-stage.

By contrast, Paul Leonard's *The Turing Test* (BBC, £5.99) is so startlingly good that it confounds expectations about the quality of spinoffery. It might well have worked better as a non-*Who* book, not least because I couldn't shake off the impression that the Doctor character was based on David Bowie's Newton in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* rather than Paul McGann. But the Doctor is not the viewpoint character here; instead, we are privy to the testimony of Alan Turing, followed by that of Graham Greene, and finally Joseph Heller – the latter two commenting on their predecessors' accounts of events. In essence the story is simple; an alien message, originating from Germany, has been intercepted in Bletchley Park in 1944, and the Doctor, whose status is already precarious enough, wants to go behind enemy lines to investigate. The triumph is in the telling here – Leonard's prose is succinct and precise, often very



moving, and occasionally transcends the clichés inherent in the franchise. When Greene states, "Mankind has no future, none whatsoever," it is not yet another tiresome announcement that the aliens have taken over; rather, it is a genuinely chilling summing up of how people might have felt when they knew they were entering the nuclear age.

Kim Philby, who made a brief appearance in *The Turing Test*, takes centre stage in *Endgame* by Terrance Dicks (BBC, £5.99). It is 1951, the Doctor has been stranded for over half a century, and the strain is now beginning to show. But despite his unwillingness to get involved in anything, he finds himself recruited to assist with the defection of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, which in turn results in an entanglement with the mysterious Players, who first turned up in a novel of that name. (Four books into the new range and old continuity is already creeping back in...) This time they are playing chess with nations, with a view to provoke another world war.

Endgame is a very readable, fast-moving adventure. It also works pretty well as an easy-to-digest potted history of the Cold War. As science fiction it is less successful. Not for the first time, Dicks uses the plot device of alien mind-control to account for the behaviour of certain historical charac-

ters – as if their behaviour needed accounting for! Consequently, although I quite enjoyed the presence of the Players, I found myself mentally editing them out, and turning the book into a straight spy story.

Peter Darvill-Evans' Past Doctor Adventure, *Independence Day* (BBC, £5.99), sees Sylvester McCoy's Seventh Doctor and companion Ace arrive in the Mendeb solar system. This in itself is remarkable; despite the fact that the TARDIS is supposedly a spaceship, it hardly ever seems to land anywhere other than Earth, or else a planet so like Earth it might as well be Earth. Even more remarkable is the fact that some thought has gone into the creation of the Mendeb colony worlds – not quite enough to make Larry Niven nervous, to be sure, but it's a step in the right direction.

The story is essentially a Ruritanian romance – typically, the author has a character tell us this. King Vethran of Mendeb Three has been recovering old technology at a faster rate than the people of

Mendeb Two, so he's been enslaving his less advanced neighbours, and indulging in dreams of empire. The Doctor takes on the role of Spartacus, which fortunately coincides with Vethran's former aides deciding their king needs deposing. A rather

straightforward adventure ensues, enjoyable enough but with few surprises until the book is nearly finished. Despite the satisfying resolution, I was quite sorry to leave Mendeb; for possibly the first time ever with a Doctor Who novel, I was left wanting to know more.

The cover of Keith Topping's *The King of Terror* (BBC, £5.99) shows a spaceship attacking Hollywood. Surprise surprise, *Terror* is yet another Doctor Who account of a bunch of aliens attempting to destroy the Earth. As there is absolutely no chance whatsoever that they will succeed, suspense is thin on the ground, and as the idea has been worked to death, and worked to death again, and worked to death some more, interest is thin on the ground too.

Anyway, apart from that... It's an easy enough read, and the characters are reasonably engaging – though it's probably bad practice to tell the reader that a character sounds like Homer Simpson or looks like Harry Kim out of *Voyager*. The book features an evil software corporation called InterCom which is run by undercover aliens, so I was expecting a few digs at Microsoft, but they weren't forthcoming. Some of the action scenes, including a shoot-out in the desert, are quite well done, but they feel like extraneous chapters in an extraneous book. The author's ignorance of basic science is shocking, and his determination to list the entire contents of his record collection is frankly pathetic. In short, this is pure fan fiction. No vision, no imagination.

Paul Beardsley

A Sea of Polluted Stories

Tim Robins

At the heart of Michael Moorcock's *King of the City* (Scribner, £16.99) lies an imaginary London constructed through the consciousness of the book's protagonist, Dan Dover – paparazzo, raconteur and the grubbier remnant of the Eternal Champion ever to darken the multiverse. Dover, a little bit of pornography that is forever England, trades in obscenity. The novel opens with him suspended from

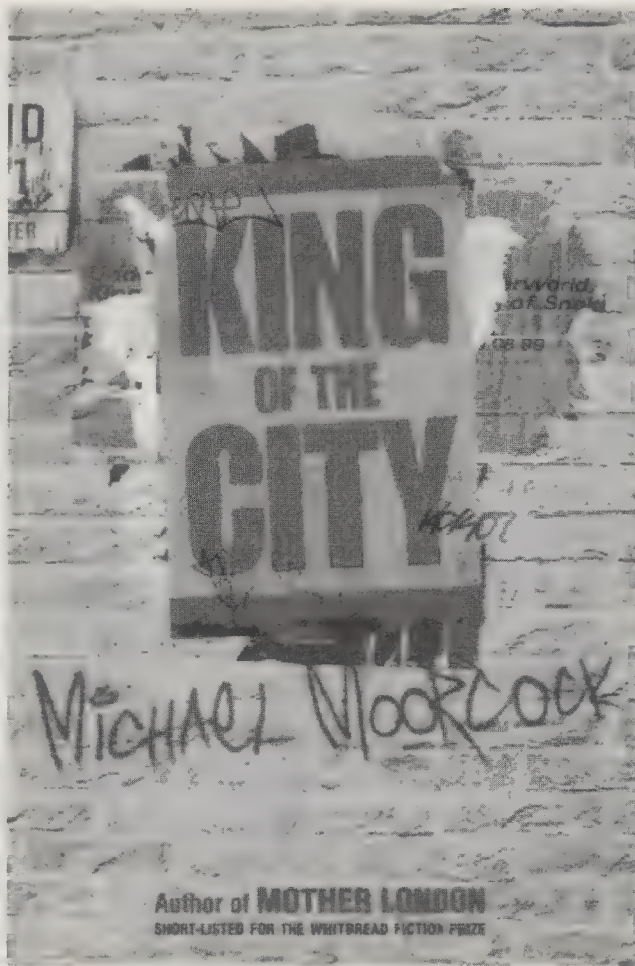
a balloon over a Cayman island and taking photographs of billionaire Barbican Begg, believed dead but caught by Dover alive and well and bonking the Duchess of Essex. Returning home with Begg's buttocks immortalized on film, a triumphant Dover finds his work has been rendered decisively off-scene by the deaths of Princess Diana and Dodi al Fayed, here caricatured as "The People's Princess" and "Prince

Harrod-al-Ritz." Dover, vilified and on the edge of destitution, turns to old friends and places in London, reacquainting himself and us with the twists of fate that have intertwined his life with those of Barbican Begg and Rosie Beck (Dover's cousin and Begg's wife).

Billed as a sequel to *Mother London* (1988), *King of the City* lacks that book's comforting madness. There's a gendered division of labour here and Moorcock's latest novel never strays far from the masculinized world of big business, city streets and hard times. In part, this is a tale of London told from the point of view of a gentleman's club, but one where the wallpaper has peeled, the carpets and curtains have thinned and faded and springs have begun to poke through the chairs' upholstery. The threat of redevelopment into a shopping mall is never far away and the members are being thrown out on the streets.

It is just possible to connect *King of the City* to the rest of Moorcock's oeuvre. There are sparing references to members of the multiverse gang. The pilot of Dover's balloon is Captain Desmond Bastable, Dover's stepfather is Gentleman Jerry Cornell. Of course it was Jerry Cornelius who was crowned King of London in *The Condition of Muzak* (1977) and the Cornelius stories are this novel's closest relations. It inherits two of their key juxtapositions: one, of close familial relations with an impersonal universe; the other, of a nostalgic sense of locality within a global now-when. Begg is a child of Miss Brunner. The world is his playpen. Adopted into a monied aristocracy, he uses his wealth to toy with tradition. Begg power-breakfasts among history's ruins. In one memorable scene, Tower Bridge becomes his plaything. This is London as Legoland. In a world where the wealthy are unimaginably so and global companies control countries, nationalism is out of place.

All postmodernism's big issues are on sale here. The book addresses the complex relationship between memory, narrative, time and space. Moorcock weaves together autobiographical detail with dense evocations of a London life. But don't be fooled. This isn't a simple homesickness, it's nostalgia for nostalgia. Where social relations have been uprooted by war, occupation and the relentless quest for wealth, the possibilities for a genuine sense of place are minimal. The book's locales are places of memory and, as such, have a tenuous hold on the past and present. So Sporting Club Square, a



19th-century development of the Begg patriarchy, is first recalled as a bohemian home to hip young couples "who bought *The Yellow Book*, *The Savoy* and *The Studio*," then forgotten as a location overlooked by contemporary cab drivers' Knowledge.

Dover's view is typically jaundiced, "some people find Sporting Club Square romantic. To me it's always been a hideous bit of Victorian greenery-yallery folly." But it's a mistake to read Dover's take on life as Moorcock's own. In *King of the City*, Moorcock writes against his own grain. At times, the world view on offer here is sufficiently gloomy to envelop the reader in a miasma of bitterness and despondency. When Cornelius visited the South Coast he seemed to take its seedier, more conservative aspects in his stride. Compare this with Dover, who sinks into despair at taking the Brighton Belle to a South Coast "thick with disappointed amnesia." These parts made wearying reading on the Connex service to Preston Park for Friday nights at The Mitre.

Readers anxious for the old Moorcock fix will find it in the book's climactic charity concert at which Begg, Dover and Rosie jam on stage to an audience that includes Princess Margaret and Salman Rushdie. The event is a festival and a model for a kind of social

integration. Kaleidoscopic images of London form the concert's backdrop. The city becomes pure spectacle. Moorcock's own work appears on the concert's playlist. A reformed Deep Fix are enjoying chart-topping success with *Brothel in Rosenstrasse*. In this way the author weaves himself into a tapestry of threads drawn from popular, middlebrow and high culture. A single page spans references to *Alien*, *The Times*, *Oliver Twist* and *Spare Rib*.

Moorcock's relationship to these cultures is tense. His editorship of *New Worlds* helped modernize science fiction. The Jerry Cornelius stories gestured to the work of the Independent Group, the precursors of Pop Art. While the group's "This is Tomorrow" exhibition plundered popular science-fiction imagery and converted it into high-art kitsch, Moorcock imported high culture into low. This had an effect. Martin Amis can still be seen on late night educational television recalling a time when science fiction might have become the mainstream literature of the 20th century. But where J. G. Ballard can pull off cool disinterest, Moorcock's work is ripe with passionate eroticism. Who remembers William

Burroughs's characters? Who can forget Moorcock's? He's always been too involved to play modernity's Time Lord.

Here Moorcock consigns his collages of newspaper clippings, illustrations and story fragments to the morgue in favour of cod social realism. Dover makes the case for *King of the City* as Dickensian melodrama. He celebrates Dickens's "fascination with filth" and champions the popular support his stories received. But Dover's views are decidedly twisted. Dickens is the touchstone for many genre writers seeking the literary limelight. Moorcock is smarter than that. *King of the City* is more Tom Wolfe than Salman Rushdie, but it's thoroughly postmodern just the same.

In the 1970s, Moorcock's work captured what drama critic and cultural theorist Raymond Williams would have called "the structure of feeling" of a new age. Moorcock's sagas of Jerry Cornelius and the Dancers at the End of Time allowed an adolescent readership access to an emerging, anarchic politics of identity. *King of the City* is an adults-only affair, a mature vision of the world as a sea of polluted stories and of London as phantasmagoria: dubious, but none-the-less real.

Tim Robins

One of a series of affordable monographs, "Writers and Their Work," that also includes studies of William Golding and Doris Lessing, Michel Delville's *J. G. Ballard* (Northcote House, 1999, £8.99) is a welcome addition covering most of Ballard's fiction up to *Cocaine Nights* in 100 compact pages. Delville is based at the University of Liège, yet this critique is largely free of academic jargon and the author is sensitive to matters of style, as when he remarks about Ballard's "own unmistakable style, which alternates between the bald and baroque, the clinical sanity of the scientist and the raw, convulsive energy of Surrealism" (Introduction, p6).

His ten thematic chapters cover the three "periods" or "phases" of Ballard's development: "(he) belongs to that category of writer who are engaged in a constant revision of a number of recurrent modes and themes which, in different forms, survive and transcend each 'period' of his work" (p3).

In "The Nature of the Catastrophe" he covers Ballard's first phase including the trilogy of disaster novels and related short stories like the remarkable "The Voices of Time" which he compares with Thomas Pynchon's story "Entropy," also written in the early 1960s. Summarizing *The Drowned World* he writes: "By concentrating on inner changes and self-discovery rather than action, on imagery rather than plot, Ballard's novels of catastrophe introduced a whole range of new formal and thematic possibilities into SF literature" (p13).

All the books are referred to by initials (e.g. DW or CW) and there is a full glossary of titles at the front. This chapter closes with a short discussion of Ballard's psychiatric fables "Minus One" and "The Insane Ones," and a pithy comparison is made with Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (p61). Already it is apparent that Delville is concerned to avoid treating Ballard as a genius in isolation. At the outset he tackles head-on the hostile Robert Platzner whose "criticism of Ballard's apocalyptic strategies screens off the many ways in which Ballard's fiction is as concerned with the possibility of self-fulfilment and spiritual regeneration, as well as with the healing powers of the imagination as it is preoccupied with violence, regression and the entropic dissolution of society" (p5).

This rebuttal becomes especially relevant in "The Death of Affect," which analyses *The Atrocity Exhibition* (AE), and "An Alphabet of Wounds," the following chapter on *Crash* and *Concrete Island* (CI). All three of these works but especially

A Writer and His Work

John K. Brady

AE are treated as part of the second "phase" of Ballard's development. At the same time the present-day settings, etc, do not herald a break with the earlier fiction. As he puts it: "the problematic of time and space which inform AE can thus be seen as a continuation of the basic entropic landscapes of his earlier work. Perhaps, more importantly, however it is also a reflection of Ballard's ongoing fascination with Surrealist painting and its capacity to produce 'a heightened or alternate reality beyond that familiar to our sight or senses' (UGM, p84)" (p25).

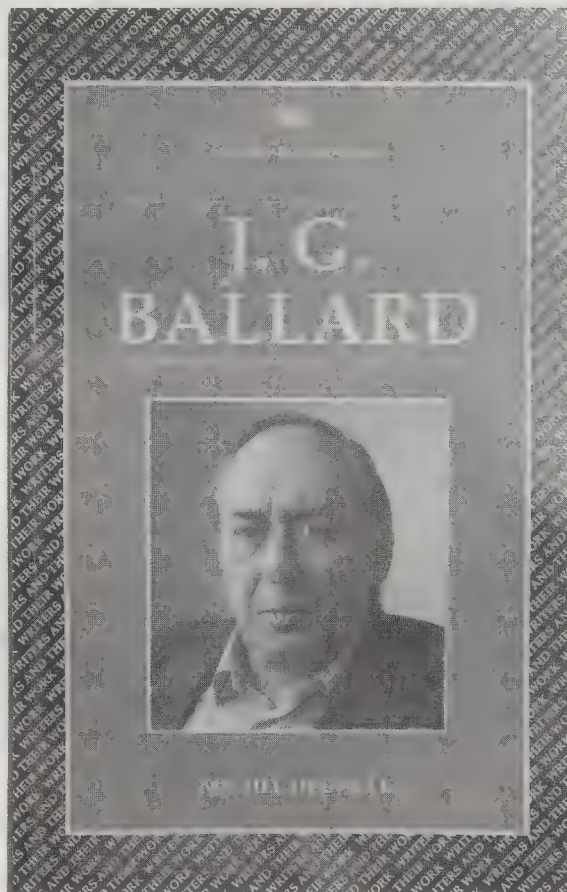
Over-conscious of the controversy *Crash* and AE have continued to arouse (he cites the Doubleday pulping

of the first US edition of the latter), Delville is somewhat on the defensive in these chapters, wisely declining to claim too much. This makes his analysis more persuasive, as can be seen in the following summation: "... what Ballard is concerned with is the secret 'nightmare logic' of contemporary violence not its glamour or commercial appeal. [He] is therefore neither a moralist nor an apologist, but a visionary observer of what he perceives as the cold post-morality of a fragmented, narcissistic age" (p30).

In "Suburban Nightmares" Delville moves on to *High-Rise* and – out of chronology – *Running Wild*. You begin to see why he has linked these kindred works when he writes: "One of the underlying 'theses' of the novel is indeed that the structures and mechanisms which regulate our late twentieth-century societies deny our deepest unconscious needs in the name of security and order. *H-R* therefore suggests that such societies are never immune to a return of the repressed, the scale of which will be directly proportional to the degree of physical and spiritual confinement of the individual" (pp50-51).

A key chapter in his study is the seventh, on the role of the media in our lives: "The Loss of the Real." Here he manages to link Ballard's three "phases" or "periods" referred to earlier. On the relationship between fiction and the re-invention of the real he points up "... the new set of properties offered by what Ballard sees as a complex mesh of inter-connecting environmental changes... Ballard constantly presents these changes as both the cause and the end-product of his characters' bizarre personalities – according to which view, technology both meets and creates profound and irrepressible psychological needs at the same time it affords us new strategies by which to cope with external social pressures" (pp64-65). A cogent description of the dynamic of Inner Space – defined by Ballard as "that area where the outer world of reality and the inner world of the psyche meet and fuse" – and a précis of Delville's overall approach to the Ballardian universe.

These insights are reiterated in the next chapter, "From Shanghai to Shepperton," where *Empire of the Sun* (ES), *The Day of Creation* (DC) and *The Kindness of Women* (KW) come under his scrutiny. However I must take issue with his comparison re KW's protagonist: "Jim's recognition of the blurring of boundaries between the real and its medium is once again reminiscent of Jean Baudrillard's famous dictum on the nature of reality in an image-saturated, post-indus-



trial world, the real becoming 'not only what can be reproduced *but that which is already reproduced*' (pp72-73). A page later, Delville is describing them both as semiotics, which I found an unhelpful attempt at co-opting Ballard into French academe – an unnecessary "blurring of boundaries" between fiction and analysis.

More generally on the "autobiographical" novels, Delville points up the important "fact that Ballard's parents and children are almost entirely left out suggests that his main concern is not to offer an objective and

exhaustive account of his past experiences but to dramatise his quest for his own childhood self, which was stolen from him – or, at least 'postponed' (KW p342) by the war" (p76). In interviews, Ballard himself has characterized the creative process as one of reaching psychological truths by means of his fictional strategies.

Of the more recent novels Delville is particularly hard on *Rushing to Paradise* but declines to illustrate its failings. *Cocaine Nights* fares much better – though, in common with other critics, he doesn't query the appropriateness of its title. Finally in "Reflec-

tions in Place of a Conclusion" it becomes even more apparent than before that Delville lacks a sense of humour and is unable to appreciate Ballard's biting wit and irony. The contradictions in his essays and reviews – written over more than three decades – which trouble this critic are a sign of developing ideas and having an open agenda: a strength and not a flaw. But all in all, Delville's is a worthy addition to the canon of studies of this influential writer and his significance both inside and outside the sf field.

John K. Brady

What can you say about Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (Cassell, £30) that hasn't been said before? First published by Thomas Caxton, no less, in 1485, it's the basis of almost every Arthurian fantasy novel and film of the present day. Merlin's deception of Igraine, the boy Arthur pulling the sword out of the stone, the treachery of Arthur's half-sister Morgan le Fay, Excalibur, the Round Table, the doomed love triangle of Arthur, Guinever and Launcelot, the quest for the Grail, Arthur's last journey across the lake... These are stories we know almost by instinct; they're bred into our racial collective unconscious. The Matter of Britain, indeed.

Except, of course, that most of it was written by French *conteurs*, *trouvères* and troubadours, and some bits of it by Germans. The whole chivalric courtly love aspect is pure Occitan (i.e.

Brutal, Noble, Greedy Humanity

David V. Barrett

Provençal) in origin. Both Launcelot and the Grail, as we now know it, came from Chrétien de Troyes, adding both adultery and spirituality into the mix. Malory's contribution wasn't only to draw so many tales together from

so many sources into a cohesive whole, but to do it in everyday English rather than courtly French or scholarly Latin, and so to reclaim the stories of Arthur and his knights for these Isles. True, you could say that Geoffrey of Monmouth started this process with his *History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136), drawn largely from Celtic tales, but that was written in Latin, and in any case was little more than an adventure story. In a very real sense, it was Malory who made this corpus the Matter of Britain. And it's rarely been out of print since.

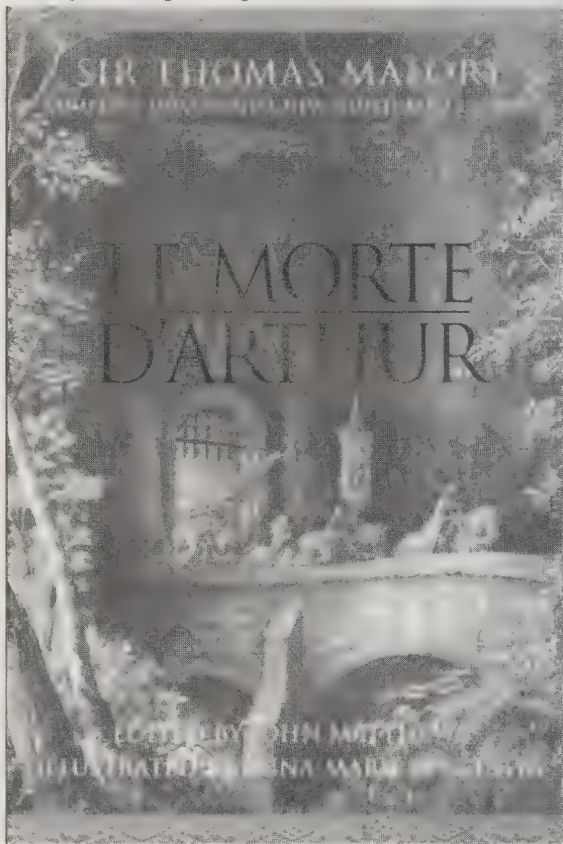
Why, then, a new edition now? Especially as the text is largely that of A. W. Pollard's 1900 edition, which was before the manuscript version discovered in Winchester in 1934 shed new light on the possible differences between what Malory wrote and what Caxton published. Well, for one thing, it's freshly typeset, instead of being yet another

smudgy photo-reproduction. And it does correct some errors in earlier editions, and clarify a few obscurities. It has a useful 22-page glossary, and an invaluable 32-page index. And it's beautifully illustrated.

The editor of this edition, John Matthews, is, with his wife Caitlin, probably the foremost popular scholar of Arthuriana in our time. Separately or together, they have published dozens of books on Arthur, the Grail, Celtic mythology, and their relevance today in the field of Western esotericism. Their two-volume classic *The Western Way, An Arthurian Reader, A Celtic Reader, A Glastonbury Reader*, and many other works are essential reading for anyone seeking to draw from the power of British mythology.

Matthews's introduction briefly explores some of Malory's sources, touches on the two different versions of the text, and then runs through the four most likely Thomas Malorys of the time, without plumping for any of them as the author; he seems very doubtful of the "most popular claimant of all," Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel, because of his unsavoury character. (Astonishingly, no one spotted one careless error in the introduction, and repeated in the front flap blurb, that "more than 600 years after its composition, [this] is still one of the finest pieces of writing in English to be found anywhere." The sentiment is perfectly valid, but 1485 to 2000 comes to 515.)

Of interest to *Interzone* readers is a rather odd Foreword by Michael Moorcock, who credits one of the best-known 20th-century rewriters of the Arthur story, T. H. White's "personal kindness [which] helped me become a writer," then in an entirely gratuitous aside says that White "was lucky not to be jailed for buggery." Unlike Matthews, Moorcock goes for Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel, soldier, MP, robber and rapist, unsavoury though he was, as author of *Le Morte D'Arthur*. "Malory," he says in explanation, "presents real life in all its terrible comedy, its familiar tragedy, its unlikely hope. He gives us flawed,



torian kitsch.) Ferguson writes, "One of the rewards of illustrating Malory is to live within its landscape, move through its archetypal dramas, and keep company with the ghosts of legendary Kings." She takes on a huge responsibility: "The illustrator also has a role as storyteller, often at times saying what the author does not." She finishes, "It is a privilege to have served a world of such beauty... beauty with a serrated edge."

It's that serrated edge, that rawness of humanity which Moorcock comments on, that makes *Le Morte D'Arthur* so timelessly powerful.

David V. Barrett



self-betraying, brutal, noble, greedy humanity."

This volume, all 950 pages of it, is sumptuous, a delight to browse through. It's a beautifully presented book. But – though I wouldn't dream of suggesting it should have been done more cheaply – why should one pay £30 for this, when you can get more-or-less the same text in a Wordsworth Edition for £2.50?

For me the "added value" comes from the specially commissioned black and white illustrations and colour paintings, 32 of each, by Anna-Marie Ferguson. These are really quite stunning, enhancing the atmosphere of the tales. (Much as I love the Pre-Raphaelites, one can grow tired of Vic-



BOOKS RECEIVED



OCTOBER 2000

This is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian W., with Roger Penrose. **White Mars; or, The Mind Set Free: A 21st-Century Utopia.** "Legal advisor: Laurence Lustgarten." Warner, ISBN 0-7515-2978-8, 323pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1999; it's labelled "General Fiction" on the back cover, but of course it's a novel of ideas in the grand tradition of sf utopias; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 155.) 9th November 2000.

Asaro, Catherine. **The Quantum Rose.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-89062-1, 398pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the latest in this scientist-author's "Skolian Empire" series of romantically-tinged sf adventures – which she seems to be producing at the rate of two a year.) December 2000.

Aylett, Steve. **Atom.** Phoenix House, ISBN 1-861591-24-1, 137pp, hardcover, cover by Graham Roundthwaite, £9.99. (Humorous sf/fantasy novel, first edition; the latest in Aylett's loose "Beerlight" sequence; Michael Moorcock comments it for being "as on the button as tomorrow's news.") 12th October 2000.

Barbour, David, and Richard Raleigh. **Shadows Bend: A Novel of the Fantastic and Unspeakable.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00765-1, 311pp, trade paperback, cover by Cliff Nielsen, \$13. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; a debut novel by two new American writers; it's set in the 1930s and features the authors H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard as characters.) October 2000.

Benford, Gregory. **Worlds Vast and Various: Stories.** HarperCollins/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79054-8, 312pp, trade paperback, cover by Rick Sternbach, \$13.50. (Sf collection, first edition [?]; it contains a dozen stories, mostly hard sf, reprinted from a wide variety of magazines and anthologies.) October 2000.

Benson, Michael. **Vintage Science Fiction Films, 1896-1949.** "McFarland Classics." McFarland [Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, USA], ISBN 0-7864-0936-3, ix+219pp, trade paperback, \$25 [USA], £23.75 [UK]. (Lightly illustrated critical study and filmography of early sf movies; first published in the USA, 1985; the sterling-priced import copies are available in Britain from Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN.) In the USA, November 2000; in the UK, 18th December 2000.

Bishop, Michael. **Blue Kansas Sky: Four Short Novels of Memory, Magic, Surmise & Estrangement.** Introduction by James Morrow. Golden Gryphon Press [3002 Perkins Rd., Urbana, IL 61802, USA], ISBN 0-9655901-0-0, xv+263pp, hardcover, cover by Ron Wlatsky, \$24.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; of the four novellas, the title story, "Blue Kansas Sky," is previously unpublished; the others are "Apartheid, Superstrings, and Mordecai Thubana" [1989], "Cri de Coeur" [1994] and "Death and Designation Among the Asadi" [1973].) October 2000.

Bova, Ben. **Jupiter.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-76764-2, xii+433pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Harrison, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; having done the Moon, Mars and Venus, Bova moves on...) 16th November 2000.

Bova, Ben. **Jupiter.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87217-8, 368pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2000; proof copy received.) January 2001.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer, and Diana L. Paxson. **Priestess of Avalon.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224709-7, xiii+382pp, hardcover, cover by Paula Lewis, £16.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 2000; the blurb states: "published posthumously with the aid of Marion Zimmer Bradley's lifelong friend and collaborator, Diana Paxson, this spellbinding historical romance is the concluding volume in the Avalon series from the author of the worldwide bestseller, *The Mists of Avalon*, who died in 1999.") 6th November 2000.

Bulychev, Kir. **Those Who Survive.** Translated by John H. Costello. Fossicker Press [23 Proctor Circle, Peabody, MA 01960, USA], ISBN 0-7388-1563-6, 384pp, trade paperback, \$18. (Sf novel, originally published in Russia [we're not told when]; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen], priced at \$25; Kir Bulychev [pseudonym of Igor V. Mozheiko, born 1934] is one of Russia's most popular sf authors, whose books, we are told, have sold about ten million copies since the fall of the Soviet Union; it's good to see him published in English again – several collections of his, such as *Half a Life* [1977] and *Gusliar Wonders* [1983], were published by Macmillan USA a couple of decades ago, but there has been nothing since [until now]; this edition is "available only on-demand through Amazon.Com, Xlibris.Com, or by order from your favorite bookstore.") Late entry: Spring publication, received in October 2000.

Bunch, Chris, and Allan Cole. **Sten 3: The Court of a Thousand Suns.** "Over one million Sten books sold worldwide." Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-009-1, 275pp, A-format paperback, cover

by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; third in this rather old paperback-original space-opera series, now making its first appearance in Britain.) 2nd November 2000.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Ghosts and Grisly Things.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86758-1, xvi+300pp, hardcover, cover by Barry Appell, \$24.95. (Horror collection, first published in the UK, 1998; 20 stories by the major name in British horror, mostly reprinted from original anthologies of the previous decade or so; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 140.) 13th November 2000.

Card, Orson Scott. **Shadow of the Hegemon.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87651-3, 366pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; there will also be a leatherbound limited edition, priced at \$200 [which we don't expect to see]; sequel to *Ender's Shadow* [1999], in the revived sequence of sequels to Card's greatest success, *Ender's Game* [1985].) December 2000.

Carr, Caleb. **Killing Time: A Novel of the Future.** Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-85471-9, 310pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 2000; there may be a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; the mainstream strikes again: Caleb Carr is hitherto best known for his New York-set historical mysteries *The Alienist* and *The Angel of Darkness* [and despite the ring of their titles, neither is really fantastic]; here he turns to sf, with a story set over 20 years in the future in a world "drowning in information"; the truly astonishing thing about this piece of dystopian mainstreamer sf is that a shorter version of it was serialized in *Time* magazine, a news-weekly which doesn't publish fiction, much less serials – except when it does, evidently.) 9th November 2000.

Carroll, Jonathan. **The Marriage of Sticks.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87243-7, 270pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1999; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 148.) 15th November 2000.

Carroll, Jonathan. **The Wooden Sea.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87823-0, 302pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; "Carroll's most ambitious and visionary work to date," they claim; there are nice comments by [the now very fashionable] Jonathan Lethem on the back cover: "Jonathan Carroll is a master of sunlit surrealism – his beguiling, impossible novels are like Frank Capra films torn open to reveal the Philip K. Dick or Julio Cortazar mechanisms ticking away at their cores.") February 2001.

Carver, Jeffrey A. **Eternity's End.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85642-3, 555pp, hardcover, \$26.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; in his ongoing "Star Rigger" series, a big new space-opera epic which the author states took him four years to write.) December 2000.

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Collected Stories.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87821-4, x+966pp, hardcover, \$29.95. (Sf collection, first published in the UK, 2000 [?]; proof copy received; a mammoth, single-volume gathering of all Clarke's short stories, from "Travel by Wire," which first appeared in a fanzine called *Amateur Science Fiction Stories* in December 1937, through to "Improving the Neighbourhood," a two-page squib from *Nature*, 4th November 1999; in between those rather slight topping-and-tailing efforts, there's much solid, classic sf here, almost all of it previously collected in various volumes.) February 2001.

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Fountains of Paradise.** "SF Masterworks, 34." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-721-7, 257pp, B-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1979; by common consent, the best of Clarke's later novels; Kingsley Amis described it as "delightfully written and at times almost unbearably exciting"; this reissue contains an "Addition to the Afterword" dated 1989.) 12th October 2000.

Crosby, Janice C. **Cauldron of Changes: Feminist Spirituality in Fantastic Fiction.** McFarland [Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, USA], ISBN 0-7864-0848-0, ix+205pp, trade paperback, \$28.50 [USA], £27.10 [UK]. (Critical study of fantasy by women writers; first edition; the sterling-priced import copies are available in Britain from Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN; writers discussed include Marion Zimmer Bradley, Octavia Butler, Patricia Kennealy and Toni Morrison; according to the blurb, "the author links their fantastic novels to actual currents within the feminist spirituality movement, addressing the genre's use of goddess worship, psychic phenomena, and reverence for the earth.") In the USA, November 2000; in the UK, 23rd November 2000.

Dalkey, Kara. **Genpei.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-89071-0, 445pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's set in medieval Japan, and based on *The Tale of the Heike*, "which some scholars have called the Japanese *Iliad*.".) December 2000.

Dedman, Stephen. **Foreign Bodies.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87259-3, 286pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; Australian author Dedman's second novel, a time-travelling, body-swapping romp; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 152.) 10th November 2000.

Dickson, Gordon R. **The Dragon and the Fair Maid of Kent.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86160-5, 400pp, hardcover, \$26.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; another adventure of Jim Eckert, the Dragon Knight, following such titles as *The Dragon and the Gnarly King* [1998] and *The Dragon in Lyonesse* [1999].) December 2000.

Douglass, Sara. **Pilgrim: Book Two of The Wayfarer Redemption.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648618-5, xi+749pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kev Jenkins, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Australia, 1997; this Australian author's fifth Big Commercial Fantasy [and they keep getting bigger], appearing some years late in Britain.) 16th October 2000.

Duncan, Andy. **Beluthahatchie and Other Stories.** Introduction by Michael Bishop. Afterword by John Kessel. Golden Gryphon Press [3002 Perkins Rd., Urbana, IL 61802, USA], ISBN 0-9655901-1-9, xvi+288pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$23.95. (Sf/fantasy/horror collection, first edition; it contains eleven stories, two of them previously unpublished, by a fairly new American author [born 1964] who was a graduate of the Clarion West writers' workshop in 1994; this is his first book; several of the stories first appeared in the magazines *Asi-*

mov's SF, Realms of Fantasy and Weird Tales.) October 2000.

Duncan, Dave. **Sky of Swords: A Tale of the King's Blades.** HarperCollins/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97462-2, 358pp, hardcover, cover by Boris Zlot-sky, \$24. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the author states: "Like *The Gilded Chain* [1998] and *Lord of the Fire Lands* [1999], this book can be read as a stand-alone novel. However, all three together tell a larger story...") October 2000.

Elgin, Suzette Haden. **Native Tongue.** Afterword by Susan M. Squier and Julie Vedder. The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, ISBN 1-55861-246-7, 327pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Sf novel, first published in USA, 1984; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; described as "the feminist sf classic," this was the first of a trilogy by Elgin, the later volumes of which are *Judas Rose* [1987] and *Earthsong* [1994].) 15th November 2000.

Elliott, Kate. **Child of Flame: Volume Four of Crown of Stars.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-947-4, xii+850pp, C-format paperback, cover by Melynn Grant, £10.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2000; there may be a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; "Kate Elliott" [or Katrina Elliott, as it says in the copyright statement] is a pseudonym of Alis A. Rasmussen.) 9th November 2000.

Elrod, P. N. **Lady Crymsyn.** "The Vampire Files." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00724-4, 410pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Robinson, \$22.95. (Horror/crime novel, first edition; eighth in a series which has been underway for a decade now.) November 2000.

Fitt, Matthew. **But n Ben A-Go-Go.** Luath Press [543/2 Castlehill, The Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH1 2ND], ISBN 0-946487-82-0, xiv+207pp, hardcover, £10.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut novel by a new Scottish writer, born 1968, it's set in the late 21st century, after the British Isles have been flooded as a result of global warming; it's described as "the first science fiction novel written wholly in Scots.") Late entry: September (?) publication, received in October 2000.

Ford, John M. **The Last Hot Time.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85545-1, 205pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a slim one, but John M. Ford's "first new novel in seven years.") December 2000.

Freas, Frank Kelly. **As He Sees It.** Text by Frank Kelly Freas & Laura Brodian Freas. Foreword by Tim Powers. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-848-7, 112pp, large-format hardcover, cover by Freas, £20. (Sf art portfolio, first edition; active for nearly 50 years, Freas is one of the most popular American sf artists, recipient of ten Hugo Awards; he is known mainly for magazine work, including many covers for John W. Campbell's *Astounding SF*, which often display humorous touches; this makes for a fine tribute volume.) 23rd November 2000.

Galouye, Daniel F. **Dark Universe.** "Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07137-0, 154pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf

novel, first published in the USA, 1961; a minor classic of post-nuclear survival by a now mainly-forgotten author.) 19th October 2000.

Griffith, George. **Stories of Other Worlds & A Honeymoon in Space.** Edited by Marcus L. Rowland. "From the Forgotten Futures Library." Heliograph [26 Porter St., Somerville, MA 02143, USA], ISBN 0-9668926-3-1, 247pp, trade paperback, \$18. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1901; a welcome reissue of one of the scientific romances by the immediately pre-Vellsian British author George Griffith [1857-1906]; rather oddly, this edition contains two distinct versions of the text – the original story-series, as published in *Pearson's Magazine*, January-June 1900 [here reproduced with the magazine illustrations by Stanley Wood], and the retitled and revised book version published in 1901; there are useful appendices and notes by Marcus Rowland, tying these texts in with his interesting retro-sf role-playing game "Forgotten Futures.") Late entry: Summer (?) publication, received in October 2000.

Grundy, Stephan. **Gilgamesh.** "A magnificent retelling of humankind's oldest epic adventure." William Morrow, ISBN 0-380-97574-2, 575pp, hardcover, cover by Phil Singer, \$26. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; the author's third novel, following his other well-received historical-mythical retellings, *Rhinegold* [1994] and *Attila's Treasure* [1996].) October 2000.

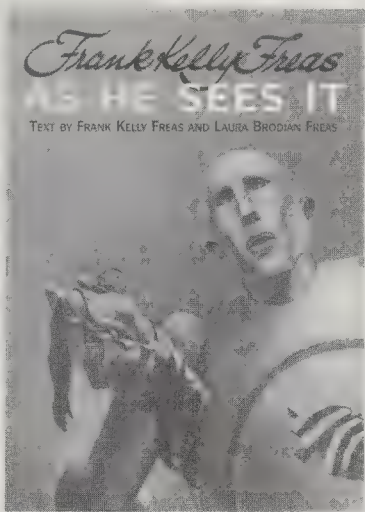
Hamilton, Laurell K. **Bloody Bones: An Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter Novel.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-050-4, 370pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Stone, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; fifth in the crime/dark fantasy series.) 2nd November 2000.

Hamilton, Laurell K. **The Killing Dance: An Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter Novel.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-051-2, 387pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Stone, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; sixth in the crime/dark fantasy series.) 2nd November 2000.

Hendrix, Howard V. **Better Angels.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00767-8, 373pp, trade paperback, cover by Victor Stabin, \$13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; Hendrix's third novel, following *Lightpaths* [1997] and *Standing Wave* [1998], this seems to have been his first hardcover [the other two were mass-market paperback originals] – but we weren't sent the first edition, alas; like the previous two, it looks to be ideas-rich sf; the author [born 1959] has degrees in both biology and English, and has also written a non-fiction book called *The Ecstasy of Catastrophe* [1990] – "a study of apocalyptic elements in English literature from Langland to Milton.") November 2000.

Holdstock, Robert. **Celtika: Book One of the Merlin Codex.** Earthlight, ISBN 0-684-86036-8, 350pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; from the blurb: "Centuries before he meets Arthur, Merlin wanders the Earth, eternally young, a traveller on the path of magic and learning; during his journeys he encounters Jason, whose search for the Golden Fleece he joins.") 2nd January 2001.

Irvine, Ian. **The Tower on the Rift: Volume Two of The View from the Mirror Quartet.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-005-9, xiii+664pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Sofilas, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Australia, 1998; the author was born in Australia in 1950.) 9th November 2000.



Jones, Diana Wynne. **Year of the Griffin.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07048-3, 218pp, hardcover, cover by Jon Sullivan, £16.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; there may be a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; the blurb describes it as "the hilarious sequel to... *The Dark Lord of Derkholm*" [1998].) 19th October 2000.

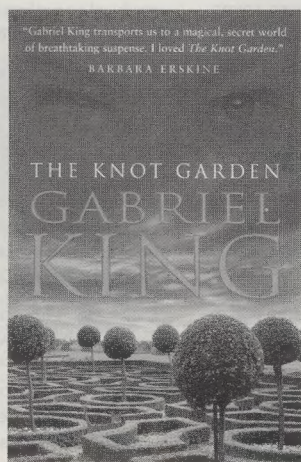
Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **Dark Terrors 5: The Gollancz Book of Horror.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07048-X, xi+562pp, hardcover, cover by Bill Sienkewicz, £17.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; there may be a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; there has been a two-year gap since *Dark Terrors 4* came out in 1998, but this bumper volume makes up for it by being over 200 pages longer; it contains all-new stories by Chaz Brenchley, Eric Brown, Ramsey Campbell, David Case, Dennis Etchison, Christopher Fowler, Mick Garris [yes, the film director and screenwriter, his piece here being a Hollywood tale called "Starfucker"], Gwyneth Jones, Nancy Kilpatrick, Joel Lane, Tanith Lee, Graham Masterton, Richard Christian Matheson, Kim Newman, Nicholas Royle, David J. Schow, Michael Marshall Smith, Brian Stableford, Peter Straub, Melanie Tem, Lisa Tuttle, Cherry Wilder and others; quite a line-up.) 19th October 2000.

Jordan, Robert. **Winter's Heart: Book Nine of The Wheel of Time.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-984-9, 668pp, hardcover, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; its author's first new book in two years, no doubt this will be another huge bestseller, crushing all before it on the mainstream lists both sides of the Atlantic; "Robert Jordan" is a pseudonym for James Rigney, Jr.) 23rd November 2000.

Kerner, Elizabeth. **The Lesser Kindred.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-89066-4, 366pp, hardcover, £24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a fantasy about dragons by a new writer who lives in Scotland, it's a follow-up to her debut, *Song in Silence* – apparently also published by Tor Books, although we don't recall seeing it.) December 2000.

Kilpatrick, Nancy, and Thomas S. Roche, eds. **Graven Images.** "Fifteen Tales of Magic and Myth." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00766-X, xiv+249pp, trade paperback, cover by Victor Stabin, \$13. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains mainly new stories about deities old and new, by Storm Constantine, Esther Friesner, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Jack Ketchum & Edward Lee, Kathe Koja, Tanith Lee, Yvonne Navarro, Kathryn Ptacek, Robert Silverberg, Lois Tilton, Lawrence Watt-Evans, Gene Wolfe, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and others.) October 2000.

King, Gabriel. **The Knot Garden.** Century, ISBN 0-7126-8083-7, 342pp, C-format paperback, £10. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there may be a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; the author's third book, following *The Wild Road* [1997] and *The Golden Cat* [1998]; "Gabriel King" is a joint pseudonym for Jane Johnson [sf and fantasy editor at HarperCollins UK] and M. John Harrison [eminent novelist].) January 2001.



Landis, Geoffrey A. **Mars Crossing.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87201-1, 331pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Landis has built up a considerable reputation for his short stories over the past couple of decades [including five here in *Interzone*], so there will be considerable interest in this, his debut novel; as might be expected of this scientist author; it's hard sf; see the interview with him which we published in *IZ* 120; this proof carries the news that in 1999 Landis "was awarded a fellowship from the NASA Institute of Advanced Concepts to help design laser-pushed lightsails for interstellar vehicles.") December 2000.

Lee, Tanith. **White as Snow.** Introduction by Terri Windling. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86993-2, 319pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; based on the traditional story of "Snow White," this is the first volume in a revival of editor Windling's "Fairy Tale" series – and the first to be written by Tanith Lee.) December 2000.

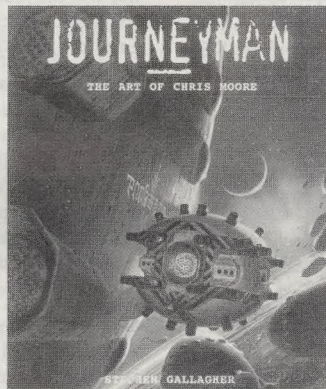
Le Guin, Ursula. **The Wind's Twelve Quarters.** "Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07139-7, xiii+303pp, C-format paperback, £10.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1975; another welcome reissue of Le Guin's first, and perhaps best, collection.) 19th October 2000.

Lewis, Anthony R. **Cordwainer Smith. Third Edition.** NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701, USA], ISBN 1-886778-25-6, 189pp, trade paperback, \$13. (A-Z guide to the sf universe of the late "Cordwainer Smith" [Paul M. A. Linebarger]; first appearance of this edition; the previous editions appeared in 1984 and 1993; obviously an essential item for Smith completists.) Late entry: August publication, received in October 2000.

McAuley, Paul. **The Secret of Life.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-225904-4, 391pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the blurb describes it as "a gripping near-future thriller for the Age of the Genome"; this exciting-looking new novel represents a move to a different publisher for a now "J"-less Paul McAuley.) 2nd January 2001.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Pegasus in Space.** "Concluding her magnificent Pegasus Series." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14630-7, 520pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Young, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2000; third in the "Pegasus" series, following *To Ride Pegasus* and *Pegasus in Flight*.) 7th December 2000.

McCarthy, Wil. **The Collapsium.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06893-0, 325pp, C-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £10.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 2000; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it's described as "combining rigorous hard science with the lyrical beauty of Michael Moorcock's *Dancers at the End of Time* novels.") Late entry: 28th September publication, received in October 2000.



MacLeod, Ken. **Cosmonaut Keep: Engines of Light, Book One.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-986-5, 308pp, hardcover, cover by Lee Gibbons, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the publishers describe it as "the first book in a new sequence that will become a landmark in science fiction.") 9th November 2000.

Moon, Elizabeth. **Surrender None: The Legacy of Gird, Book One.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-015-6, 506pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Jenkins, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; described as "the first of two prequels to the hugely popular *Deed of Paksenarrion* trilogy.") 2nd November 2000.

Moore, Chris. **Journeyman: The Art of Chris Moore.** Text by Stephen Gallagher. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-849-5, 128pp, large-format hardcover, cover by Moore, £20. (Sf art portfolio, first edition; Moore is one of the best paperback-cover illustrators in Britain [many of his striking pictures adorn the current "SF Masterworks" series from Millennium], and this is the first selection of his work to appear as a book; it's a pleasure, too, to have an accompanying text by a first-class writer who doesn't usually do this kind of thing, Steve Gallagher; in fact, this is one of Paper Tiger's most attractive books, slightly

smaller in format than their portfolios usually are [and all the better for it], with a dustjacket over a printed board cover, and colourful endpapers; recommended.) 23rd November 2000.

Moreira, Silvana, and Antonio de Macedo, eds. **The Voyage/A Viagem.** "On the Edge of the Empire: 5th Encounters of Science Fiction and Fantasy." Simetria FC&F [Pavilhao do Dramatico de Cascais, Av. da Republica, 2750-475 Cascais, Portugal], ISBN 972-97495-3-1, 156pp + 164pp, trade paperback, cover by Antonio Sachetti, no price shown. (Sf anthology, first edition; published to coincide with the fifth annual sf conference held in Cascais, near Lisbon, Portugal, it contains eleven stories by Portuguese-language authors [one of whom, David Alan Prescott, is actually of British origin]; the texts are presented in both Portuguese and English, *dos a dos*; for further information, see website at <http://simetria.esoterica.pt>.) Late entry: September publication, received in October 2000.

Morrill, Rowena. **The Art of Rowena.** Text by Doris Vallejo. Foreword by Greg and Tim Hildebrandt. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-778-2, 112pp, large-format hardcover, cover by Rowena, £20. (Fantasy art portfolio, first edition; a fine selection of the polished, almost photo-realistic, book-cover and other paintings of this popular American illustrator of the fantastic; there is a useful listing of all her works at the rear of the volume; there was an earlier volume entitled *The Art of Rowena* published in the 1980s, but this is not the same.) 23rd November 2000.

Olsen, Lance. **Freaknest.** Wordcraft of Oregon [PO Box 3225, La Grande, OR 97850, USA], ISBN 1-877655-35-X, 258pp, trade paperback, cover by Andi Olsen, \$12. (Sf novel, first edition; Olsen's fifth novel, following such earlier titles as *Tonguing the Zeitgeist* [1994] and *Time Famine* [1996], it comes with praise for the author from such luminaries as Michael Bishop, Samuel

Delany, Paul Di Filippo, Richard Kadrey, Brian Stableford and Don Webb.) *Late entry: 1st September publication, received in October 2000.*

Pohl, Frederik. **Chasing Science: Science as Spectator Sport.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86711-5, 240pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Popular science text by a major sf author; first edition; proof copy received; a fairly slim book [but welcome], the publicity letter describes it as "a memoir of the author's life-long love-affair with science.") *December 2000.*

Roberts, Keith. **Pavane.** "SF Masterworks, 35." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-937-6, viii+279pp, B-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £6.99. (Alternate-world sf novel, first published in the UK, 1968; made up from a story-cycle which first appeared in *Impulse* magazine in 1966, this is generally regarded as Roberts's finest work; sadly, this welcome reissue appeared just after, not before, the author's death in early October 2000.) *9th November 2000.*

Rosenberg, Joel. **Not Quite Scaramouche.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86897-9, 301pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *Not Exactly the Three Musketeers* [1999], in the author's "best-selling Guardians of the Flame series.") *January 2001.*

Russell, Sean. **The One Kingdom: Book One of The Swans' War.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-020-2, 550pp, hardcover, £10. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 2000; proof copy received; a Big Commercial Fantasy, it represents a first British appearance for this Canadian writer [born 1952] – who should not be confused with his highly-praised compatriot Sean Stewart [who still awaits UK publication, so far as we know].) *18th January 2001.*

Saberhagen, Fred. **The Arms of Hercules: The Third Book of the Gods.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87776-5, 352pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; like its predecessors, *The Face of Apollo* and *Ariadne's Web*, it's set in ancient Greek times – in Mary Renault-land.) *December 2000.*

Schroeder, Karl. **Ventus.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87197-X, 477pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this big planetary romance is Canadian writer Schroeder's first solo novel [he co-authored a fantasy in 1998]; the publishers describe it as "cyber-epic hard sf.") *December 2000.*

Segal, Philip, with Gary Russell. **Doctor Who: Regeneration.** "The Story Behind the Revival of a Television Legend." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-710591-6, iv+162pp, large-format hardcover, £17.99. (Illustrated companion to the making of the 1996 *Doctor Who* TV movie, first edition; it contains accounts of various versions of the script, plus a blow-by-blow history of the production – probably more than most people want to know about a not-very-memorable film.) *6th November 2000.*

Silverberg, Robert. **Sailing to Byzantium.** Simon & Schuster/ibooks, ISBN 0-7434-0718-0, viii+419pp, trade paperback, cover by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, £9.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 2000; this is the US first edition of September 2000, made available in the UK; it contains five of Silverberg's excellent novels, already familiar from other

collections – "Sailing to Byzantium" [1984], "Homefaring" [1983], "Thomas the Proclaimer" [1972], "We Are for the Dark" [1988] and "The Secret Sharer" [1987] – plus new introductions by the author.) *27th November 2000.*

Simak, Clifford D. **Way Station.** "Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07138-9, 189pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1963; a sentimental old favourite of bucolic sf – Simak's best book.) *19th October 2000.*

Slavicsek, Bill. **A Guide to the Star Wars Universe: Third Edition, Revised and Expanded.** Del Rey/Lucas Books, ISBN 0-345-42066-7, xxii+597pp, trade paperback, \$16. (Sf movie-series A-Z companion, first edition of this revision; the first two editions appeared in the early 1980s and early 1990s [no definite dates given here]; this new version has, of course, been expanded to take into account George Lucas's most recent "Star Wars" film, *The Phantom Menace*.) *October 2000.*

Sturgeon, Theodore. **The Dreaming Jewels.** "Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07140-0, 156pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1950; originally complete in one issue of the pulp magazine *Fantastic Adventures* [February 1950], this was Sturgeon's debut novel – and it still wears quite well.) *19th October 2000.*

Temple, William F. **88 Gray's Inn Road: A Living-Space Odyssey; and Other Stories.** Preface by Sir Arthur C. Clarke. Illustrations by Jim Cawthorn. Andrew Crosse at the Sansato Press [no address given], no ISBN, xxiv+244pp, hardcover, cover by Cawthorn, £25. (Humorous mainstream novel plus two sf stories, first edition; sf writer William F. Temple [1914-1989] wrote this short novel, based on his pre-World War II experiences of flat-sharing with Arthur C. Clarke, several decades ago and apparently revised it over the years, but it has remained unpublished until now; accompanying it here are the sf stories "Mind Within Mind" and "Always Afternoon"; an all-round oddity, no doubt of historical interest; there's a longish, informative but not very well written introduction by one Gordon Walters [a pseudonym for bibliographer and bookseller George Locke?], entitled "The First Slan Shack"; it's a well-produced book, but the publishers keep themselves mysterious [there is no such person as "Andrew Crosse"]; it states "Folkestone, Wembly, Edinburgh" at the foot of the title page, so the publishing house is probably a consortium of three people; however, a distribution contact address is given: c/o Cold Tonnage Books, 22 Kings Lane, Windlesham, Surrey GU20 6JQ.) *October 2000.*

Tolkien, J. R. R. **Farmer Giles of Ham.** Illustrated by Pauline Baynes. Edited by Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond. "50th Anniversary Edition." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10378-4, xxii+142pp, B-format paperback, cover by Baynes, £5.99. (Fantasy novella, first published in the UK, 1949; this exhaustively annotated and enhanced edition first published in hardcover, 1999.) *6th November 2000.*

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The History of Middle-earth I.** Edited by Christopher Tolkien. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-710505-3, 297+385+393+380+455pp, hardcover, £99.99. (Fantasy omnibus,

first edition in this form; it contains the first five volumes of the posthumously-published twelve-volume "History of Middle-earth": *The Book of Lost Tales, Part I* [1983], *The Book of Lost Tales, Part II* [1984], *The Lays of Beleriand* [1985], *The Shaping of Middle-earth* [1986] and *The Lost Road and Other Writings* [1987]; this is an overwhelmingly luxurious volume in a black cloth-covered box, "limited to a worldwide printing of 1,000 copies," bound in black leather, with coloured end-papers and gold edging; with its circa 2,000 pages printed on very fine paper, it feels like a Holy Bible; what other imaginative writer of modern times gets such treatment?) *2nd October 2000.*

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings.** Illustrated by Alan Lee. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-710502-9, ix+289pp, and 1193pp, two-volume boxed set in hardcover, covers by Lee, £69.99. (Fantasy novels, first published in the UK in four volumes, as *The Hobbit*, 1937, and *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, 1954-55; these very attractive full-colour-illustrated editions were first published in 1997 [this is the fifth printing] and 1991 [this is the twelfth printing]; as we remarked of a recent paperback set of Tolkien, it seems there is no end in sight to the repackagings of these ever-popular works.) *6th November 2000.*

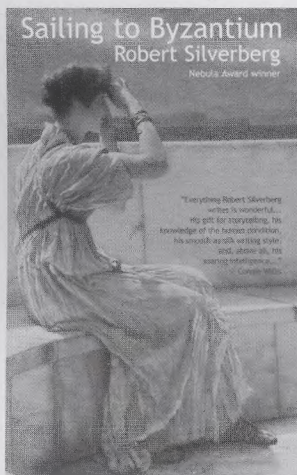
Tyers, Kathy. **Balance Point.** "Star Wars: The New Jedi Order." Century/Lucas Books, ISBN 0-7126-8496-4, xiv+333pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 2000.) *9th November 2000.*

Webb, Don. **Endless Honeymoon.** St Martin's Minotaur, ISBN 0-312-26582-4, 243pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Weird crime novel by a well-known small-press writer, first edition; proof copy received; it's Webb's third novel, following *The Double* [1998; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 144] and *Essential Saltes* [1999; which we didn't see].) *January 2001.*

Weiss, Dan. **Sewerelf.** Black Plankton Press [PO Box 1351, Cobb, CA 95426, USA], ISBN 0-9611236-2-1, v+122pp, small-press paperback, cover by Jane Irwin, \$9.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a self-published item by a California writer who has produced several earlier books, including a couple that were reviewed here by Chris Gilmore in 1998; he can be contacted at bplankton@netscape.net.) *No date shown: received in October 2000.*

Young, Janine Ellen. **The Bridge.** Earthlight, ISBN 0-7434-0415-7, 348pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 2000; proof copy received; a second novel by a fairly new American writer, it comes with a commendation from David Brin and is compared by the publishers to the works of Baxter, Bear, Brin, etc.) *4th November 2000.*

Zivkovic, Zoran. **Time Gifts.** Translated by Alice Copple-Tosic. "Writings from an Unbound Europe." Northwestern University Press, ISBN 0-8101-1782-7, 81pp, trade paperback, cover by John MacDonald, \$14.95. (Sf novella, first published in Serbia as *Vremenski Darovi*, 1997; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; the author's first book to appear in the English-speaking world, it consists of a cycle of four linked stories on a time theme – "The Astronomer," "The Paleolinguist," "The Watchmaker" and "The Artist" – of which the first was originally published in English here in *Interzone*; recommended.) *No date shown: received in October 2000.*



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